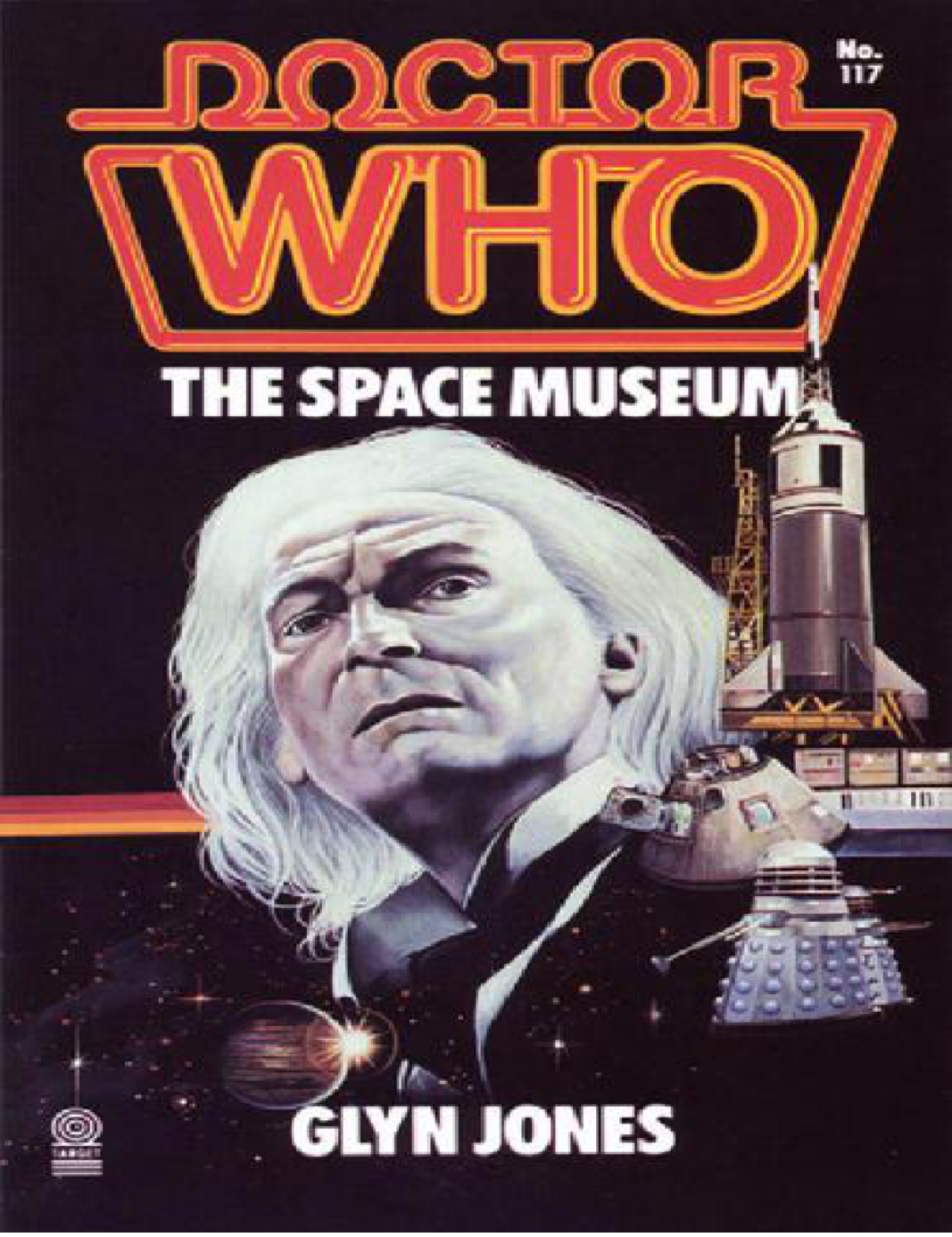
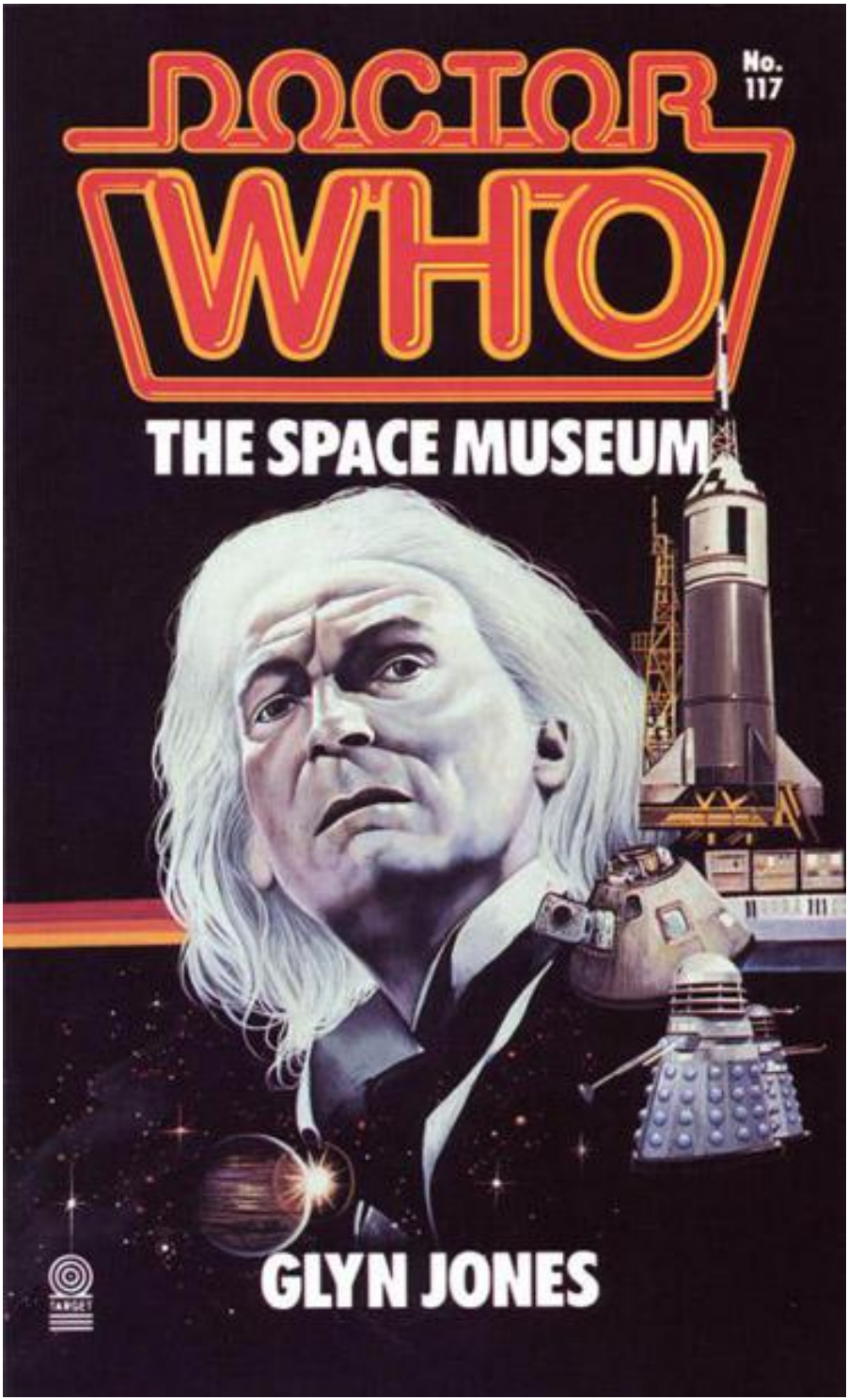
DOCTOR WHO

No. 117

THE SPACE MUSEUM



GLYN JONES



The TARDIS materialises on what, at first sight, appears to be a dry

and lifeless planet, serving only as a graveyard for spaceships.

Then the TARDIS crew discovers a magnificent museum housing relics from every corner of the galaxy. These have been assembled by the Moroks, a race of cruel conquerors who have invaded the planet Xeros and enslaved its inhabitants.

Upon further exploration the Doctor, Ian, Barbara and Vicki seem to stumble upon the impossible. For suddenly facing them in an exhibit case they find – themselves.

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DOCTOR WHO

THE SPACE MUSEUM

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1

AD 0000

Three pairs of eyes gazed at the scanner screen, eyes like those of a sad and lonely person in a strange town desperately seeking the smile of a friendly face. The fourth pair of eyes gave no hint of emotion. The Doctor was totally absorbed, totally fascinated.

Vicki sighed, a sigh so audible that Ian could not resist a sidelong glance at his young companion. He turned back to the screen and, knowing exactly how she felt, almost mechanically placed a comforting arm across her shoulders. She didn't seem to notice. Barbara sighed, perhaps not quite so audibly but, with gentlemanly impartiality, Ian's other arm reached out to comfort her.

All he could see on the screen was sand, sand, sand, and more sand. Why couldn't the TARDIS, just once, materialise in a pleasant, leafy, tree-lined street in Hampstead, or on Wimbledon Common? How about a pretty Yorkshire dale, or a Welsh mountain top with nothing around more menacing than a flock of silly sheep?

Or, if it *had* to be sand, why not a sun-drenched Californian beach? Or maybe even the South of France?

Yes, there was a pleasant thought: cafes and *cordon bleu* restaurants, palm-shaded promenades and contented humans basking on that sand, soaking up the sun's rays through their sunscreen, swimming and playing in a beautiful blue and silver sea; smiling, laughing, happy people, sipping cool drinks, tasting delicious ices. At that moment Ian could almost taste tutti-frutti.

And why couldn't the TARDIS materialise in the good old twentieth century, in some peaceful corner of the world where they could just

relax and not be caught up in the stupidity of human wars or some other folly? Ian sighed deeply and three pairs of eyes turned to look at him. He did not return their gaze but he felt himself blush.

'Where are we?' he asked, as though they were travelling from London to Manchester and he just happened to have dozed off for a few minutes. The eyes turned back to the screen and now, for the first time, something other than sand appeared as the scanner moved on.

'A rocket!' Ian squeaked. 'In the middle of miles and miles of nothing but sand?'

It was the Doctor's turn to sigh but, before he could say anything, a second rocket appeared, then another, and another; then a spaceship, and a second spaceship, and more spaceships, so many ships of such diverse shapes, periods, and design that now four pairs of eyes were rivetted to the screen.

There was no sign of life, only the ships, motionless in a sea of sand. And then, beyond them, a building came into view. The scanner moved in for a closer inspection. The building was large, very large, in shape something like a ziggurat. The surface was made up of geometric panels, triangles forming pyramids, and covered with what seemed to be a dullish metal which, although the sky was bright, gave off no reflection.

'It's the casino,' Ian thought, his mind still on sunlit beaches and gentle pleasures, 'like the casino at Monte Carlo, or Nice. We'll find two-headed monsters playing three-dimensional roulette.' He chuckled to himself and then stopped, in case someone decided to investigate his sense of humour. He needn't have worried. Everyone was too engrossed in studying the building in question. He was intrigued though by the non-reflective panels. 'Do you suppose this planet has a sun?' he queried.

The Doctor shrugged. 'Presumably,' he muttered,

'otherwise where would the light be coming from?'

'I only asked.' Ian was a trifle peeved at the Doctor's brusque reply. He was anxious now to be up and about doing something, and the Doctor, as far as he was concerned, was being his usual cautious self. Ian sighed again.

'What is the matter with you, my boy?' the Doctor snapped. 'If you carry on like that you'll sigh your life away.'

‘There doesn’t seem to be any sign of life,’ Ian answered,

‘Why don’t we go and take a closer look? Hmm?’

‘Oh, so you want to go and take a closer look, do you?

Well go ahead, no-one’s stopping you.’

‘I’m not going on my own!’

‘Then you’ll just have to be patient and wait for us, won’t you?’ And the Doctor turned his attention back to the screen. Ian glowered at the top of his companion’s head. ‘And it’s no good looking like that,’ the Doctor added, ‘if the wind changes direction you’ll stay that way.’

And he chuckled to himself.

Ian folded his arms, deciding not to say another word, and it was Vicki who eventually broke the silence.

‘Have you noticed something?’ she asked no-one in particular and everyone in general.

‘What is that, my child?’ The Doctor peered benignly at her, smiling encouragement. Ian snorted, but not too loud, just enough to show he didn’t approve of favouritism.

‘We’ve got our clothes on,’ Vicki said.

‘Well, I should hope so, I should hope so indeed!’ The Doctor sounded quite shocked.

‘No,’ Vicki persisted, ‘I mean, our ordinary, everyday clothes.’ She looked from one to the other. No-one seemed to understand what she was getting at. ‘Barbara, what was the last thing we were wearing?’ she asked.

‘We were at the Crusades,’ Ian said. ‘Are we never going to get away from deserts?’

‘Exactly,’ Vicki replied. ‘So why aren’t we still in our crusading clothes?’

‘Because we’re not crusading anymore,’ Ian laughed.

‘I don’t think it’s funny,’ Vicki said, ‘I’m being perfectly serious. How did we get from our crusading clothes into these, and where are those

clothes now?'

'Probably hanging up where they should be,' the Doctor suggested, 'And if it concerns you that much, I suggest you go and take a look.'

'Very well, I will,' Vicki pouted and turned to go.

'Oh, and on your way back,' the Doctor continued, 'you might fetch me a glass of water. I'm quite parched.'

'It's all these deserts,' Ian said.

'I don't know,' the Doctor muttered, 'all this fussing just because our clothes change. It's time and relativity, my boy, time and relativity, that's all. That's where the answer lies.'

'I dare say,' Ian replied, 'but we'd be much happier if you explained it.'

'Yes, well... er... yes...' The Doctor didn't quite know how time and relativity should affect their apparel or, to be more exact, their change of apparel, but felt somehow he should. However, he wasn't going to admit it so turned back to the control panel and flicked a few switches at random, hoping something interesting would come up on the screen to divert attention from his lack of perception.

But it was Vicki's voice that created the diversion as she called from the sleeping cabin. 'Our crusading clothes are here, Doctor!'

'Hmm? Oh, good, good.' Feeling somehow vindicated he looked up at Ian and Barbara and smiled. 'You see?'

The two exchanged a wry look.

Feeling a little like Alice in Wonderland, Vicki stood staring at the neatly hung clothes. It was all most peculiar.

What was the last thing she remembered? 'I blacked out,'

she murmured. 'How could I change my clothes if I blacked out? And the others didn't seem to know anything so presumably they must have blacked out too.'

Shaking her head, she moved away, though the puzzle stayed with her. She filled a glass with water and turned to go. The hanging clothes caught her eye and, still distracted, she let the glass slip from her fingers.

It seemed an eternity before it hit the floor and shattered. She watched it happen almost as if it were in slow motion. Then, before she could do anything, a reversal took place. The fragments of glass came together again and seemingly leapt into her open hand, an intact and full glass of water. Vicki was too amazed to do anything other than stand and gape.

And she was not the only one. In the console three pairs of eyes were staring at the space-time clock. It was Barbara who had seen it first and her gasp of astonishment had immediately caught the attention of the others.

The clock read 'AD 0000.'

'What on earth does it mean?' Ian whispered when he had more or less rediscovered his voice. 'I mean, if we were on Earth, what on earth would it mean?'

'Perhaps it's broken down,' Barbara ventured hopefully.

'I certainly hope so,' was the rejoinder. 'It's like being suspended in time, in limbo, and that doesn't appeal to me one little bit.'

Vicki, carefully nursing her glass of water, entered the console room to be brought up short by the expression of Ian's sentiments and she too joined in the contemplation of the clock.

'Perhaps it has something to do with our blacking-out,'

she said finally.

Ian turned to the Doctor. 'What do you make of it?' he asked.

The Doctor shrugged, meaning he didn't make much of it at all. 'Well...' He tapped the side of his nose and pursed his lips, then went on '... it could be any one of a dozen things.'

Barbara and Ian exchanged glances.

'There's no such year of course,' the Doctor went on.

'You've probably worked that out for yourselves already.

I've only ever had trouble with that clock once before.' He wagged an admonishing finger at the offending instrument. 'That was when Augustus Caesar created his own calendar and left a day out of the one I'd been working on. Very inconsiderate. Amateurs should not

tamper with things they know nothing about.'

'I wouldn't have thought just one day would make all that much difference,' Barbara said.

'One day per year over several million years is quite significant, Barbara.'

'Yes, of course,' Barbara agreed.

Ian resisted the temptation to say that several million years hadn't passed since the time of Augustus and instead, somewhat impatiently, he asked, 'Yes, but what has happened this time?'

But the Doctor had given himself time to think. He put out a hand in a most delicate gesture and inclined his head slightly. It was something he had once seen Lao-Tzu do and it had impressed him mightily. It certainly had had the desired effect on the lapsed disciple at the time.

'Patience,' he gently chided, 'I'm just coming to that.

After that impertinent piece of Roman interference I decided I couldn't have the clock going wrong again. It took far too long to repair. So I decided on an added refinement. If something is about to go wrong the dials set themselves in the position you see now and the clock isolates itself from the circuit. Saves a tremendous amount of trouble.' He was glad he had remembered this and smiled, well pleased with himself.

'Then something has gone wrong,' Barbara said simply.

'Yes, I suppose it has,' the Doctor replied, equally as simply and feeling somewhat deflated.

'Well what can it he?' she persisted.

'I don't know.' For a moment his admission of fallibility deflated him even further but the sudden look of panic on the faces of his companions quickly brought him round.

'Obviously,' he said in his most authoritative manner, 'the trouble is a direct result of time friction.:

'What is that?' Ian asked, unable to hide the incredulity in his voice.

'A sort of space static electricity, I suppose, would be the best description,' was the answer.

‘I know!’ Vicki burst in. ‘Like people have when they can’t wear a watch. You know, they put the watch on their arm and it stops but, when they take it off, it starts again.

And then when they...’

‘All right, Vicki,’ Ian cut in, ‘we’ve got the picture.’ He turned back to the Doctor. ‘You mean it would set up some sort of interference with the clock mechanism?’

‘Well, something has!’ the Doctor snapped.

Ian nodded his head slowly. ‘So the clock reverted to the safety device.’

‘Well done,’ the Doctor congratulated him, not without a hint of sarcasm.

‘You don’t seem at all worried,’ was the response. The Doctor’s eyes narrowed. Was Ian on the attack or merely stating what he thought was obvious? He decided to parry the question. ‘Why should I be?’ he shrugged.

‘All right...’

Wait for it, the Doctor thought, here comes the thrust.

‘... What year are we in?’

The Doctor parried again. ‘A good question,’ he said.

‘Deserves a good answer. After all, we’ve got billions to choose from. Shall we take a guess and see who is the closest?’

‘Ian!’ It was Barbara deciding to cut short the discussion. She wasn’t prepared to referee a fight and was also aware that Vicki was getting frightened.

‘There is no need to guess,’ the Doctor said. ‘The clock has a built-in memory. It will adjust itself as soon as we move off again. Time friction has a convenient habit of being localised.’

‘Do you think it was this time friction that made us go to sleep?’ Vicki asked.

‘Oh, no doubt about it.’ The Doctor felt he was on firmer ground again. ‘Just as the clock protected itself by becoming neutralised, so

we have been protected by falling asleep. At least that is the best theory I can advance at the moment.'

'All right,' Ian said, 'I accept the fact that we don't know *when* we are, but couldn't we at least try to find out where we are?'

'Certainly... Of course... Immediately.' The Doctor returned to his seat and his dials.

Vicki coughed. The Doctor turned back to peer at her.

She held out the glass of water. He reached out and took it.

'Oh, my dear, pardon me. What terrible manners. While we were so busy arguing...' He cast a significant accusatory glance at Ian '... You've been standing there so patiently with my water. Thank you.' He took a sip.

'Does it taste all right?' she asked.

The Doctor seemed somewhat surprised at this. 'Taste?'

he said. 'All right? Well, of course it tastes all right. Why shouldn't it?'

'Because it's been all over the deck.'

'What has?'

'The water has. And the glass.'

'What are you talking about, child?'

'I dropped it.'

'Dropped it?'

'I dropped it.' Vicki paused for dramatic effect. 'And it smashed - into smithereens.' Another pause for added dramatic effect. 'And, as I stood there, in front of my eyes, it all came together again and leapt into my hand, water and all.'

'Leapt into your hand!'

'I could hardly believe it.'

'And neither can I.' The Doctor scratched the side of his neck. 'Leapt? Came together again?' He transferred the glass from one hand to the

other and scratched the otherside of his neck. Then he sniffed and looked from the glass to Vicki and back to the glass.

‘You think I imagined it, don’t you?’ the girl asked.

The Doctor sniffed again.

‘Well, drop it and see.’

‘No, no,’ he said, ‘I don’t think I’ll bother. I will assume it also has something to do with the friction. And don’t ask me what!’ he added hastily to Ian.

‘I wasn’t going to,’ Ian said.

The Doctor put down the glass and they all turned their attention to the screen and the panel of instruments. After a moment the Doctor continued. ‘Yes... well... we seem to have arrived on a remarkable little planet and it appears to be quite safe. So why don’t we venture outside, hmm?

We’re not going to get any answers staying here, are we?’

‘Safe?’ Vicki squeaked. ‘I think it might be a bit dangerous. I mean, there’s the clock, and the glass, and all of us blacking out. I don’t think...’

‘She’s right,’ Ian said. ‘It’s all too quiet. No sign of life anywhere. I don’t like it.’

‘But you were the one, a short while ago, who wanted to go out. Now what is worrying you? I know exactly where we are.’

‘You do?’ It. was a choral response.

‘Of course I do! Look, what is that?’ The Doctor pointed to the scanner screen. His three companions peered at the object in question.

‘I don’t know,’ Ian admitted. He turned to Barbara. ‘Do you?’ Barbara shrugged. He turned to Vicki.

‘It’s a communications satellite,’ she said, ‘From Earth.

Russian by the look of it, about 1980.’

‘Oh, is it?’ said Ian sceptically.

‘Yes, it is,’ the Doctor concurred. Vicki smiled at Ian. If she hadn’t been a well-mannered young lady she might have been tempted to put out her tongue but, from the look on Ian’s face, it would seem the smile sufficed.

‘Now, what do you suppose it’s doing here, hmm?’ the Doctor went on.

‘Obviously it got lost in space, went out of orbit and landed here, or crashed rather,’ said Ian.

‘Nonsense, my boy. It may be a bit tarnished with a dent here or there but it’s all in one piece. No, my opinion is, it was brought here, together with everything else.’ There was a hint of excitement in the Doctor’s voice and the tempo of his speech increased. ‘If you look at each of those objects beyond the satellite - each ship, each rocket - you will notice that each one is advanced in design. It’s a natural progression. And that is precisely why I know where we are. There’s nothing random about the positioning of any of these objects. They’ve been placed like that.’

‘You mean it’s like a... a museum?’ Barbara asked.

‘Precisely!’ The Doctor was at his most triumphant, ‘A space museum.’

‘Then there must be somebody to look after it,’ Ian said.

‘A distinct possibility.’ The Doctor rose to his feet.

‘Shall we go and find out?’ He nonchalantly flicked a switch on the control panel and the doors of the TARDIS

slid open. No-one moved.

‘Well?’ the Doctor queried, ‘Have you no sense of scientific curiosity? No sense of adventure? Vicki, what about you? What about the glass? Aren’t you just a tiny bit curious?’

‘A little,’ Vicki said.

‘A little is enough. Come.’ And, without bothering to see who followed, the Doctor turned and led the way.

2

Exploration

Unexpectedly, the air was quite mild. They stood outside the TARDIS and looked around. Ian squinted up at the sky. There were two suns, quite small and very far away, but two nevertheless. This would explain both the light and the coolness of the atmosphere. The silence was broken by the Doctor.

'Close the door, Chesterton,' he commanded. 'You weren't born in a barn. I believe that is the quaint colloquial expression.' Ian bit his tongue and obliged and, with the TARDIS safely locked, they moved away, their feet making no sound and sinking quite deeply in the white dust that covered the surface. The Doctor rubbed his hand on a rock and looked at his palm.

'Steatite,' he muttered.

'Dust, I'd call it,' Ian replied, forgetting for a moment that he had determined to keep his opinions to himself for a while. Everything today - whatever day it was; probably some Friday the 13th - seemed to be conspiring against him. Maybe his bio-rhythms were at rock bottom.

Certainly the Doctor seemed to have it in for him. But then, maybe he wasn't feeling all that secure himself, and that would explain his testiness. But, for once, they seemed to be in accord.

'Yes, that's exactly what it is,' the Doctor agreed. 'I've never seen erosion in such an advanced stage. The whole planet would seem to be completely dead.'

Once again Ian forgot his resolution. 'How can you make such a sweeping statement?' he challenged, 'We've only seen a few square yards of it. I've always associated planetary extinction with extreme cold. You know, like the dark side of the moon. *Our* moon.'

'Oh!' the Doctor blasted back, 'You've been there, have you?' And then, on a quieter note but still with an edge,

'No, no, of course not. I beg your pardon.'

Barbara decided to intervene. She had no idea how long they had all slept but the rest obviously hadn't done these two much good, hissing at each other like a couple of alley cats.

'The climate seems quite pleasant...'

Ian turned on her.

‘Maybe it gets colder when it’s dark,’ she added hurriedly.

‘And there’s another thing,’ Ian persisted, turning back to the Doctor, ‘if the *entire* planet…’ He stressed the word with such vehemence it sounded like the release of a slingshot… ‘is dead, then where is the oxygen coming from? The atmosphere is not only pleasant, we happen to be breathing it.’ Game, set and match, Ian thought.

‘It could be artificially manufactured,’ the Doctor replied and, before Ian could argue further, went on: ‘But it’s no good standing here speculating. Let’s go and search for some answers, htnm?’ He smiled placatingly. ‘But keep together, is that clear?’ They all nodded and, led by the Doctor, started to move in the direction of the building they had seen on the scanner. They had gone only a few steps when Ian stopped and called: ‘Doctor!’

‘Oh, what is it now, Chesterton?’ The Doctor was growing more than a little impatient. He stopped, turned, and glared at Ian. But Ian was not going to be put off. He glanced around to make sure they were all looking at him and, having their attention, he said, ‘You’d agree that we’re walking on some sort of dust, I’d say at least an inch deep, wouldn’t you?’

‘Yes, yes, of course. What of it?’ The Doctor’s manner was even more testy. If someone had something to say why not just say it instead of beating about the bush?

Ian dropped his bombshell: ‘Then why aren’t we leaving footprints?’ His voice was very quiet and it was seconds before the others could take their eyes off his face and look down at their feet.

There were no footprints.

They stood for a moment, not knowing what to do or what to say. Then Ian took a few steps. His feet made prints in the dust which they all saw but then, as they watched, the prints disappeared and it was as if no-one had walked there. They all turned to look at the Doctor who merely shook his head, as bewildered as they were.

‘Strange,’ he said, ‘Most strange.’

‘Any theories?’ Ian asked blithely.

The Doctor shook his head again. ‘No, my boy, none whatsoever. But I’m sure an explanation will present itself sooner or later. Let’s continue our journey shall we?’

They set off once more, none of them being able to resist looking around every now and again to watch their footsteps disappear behind them. But, after a while, the game lost its novelty and they turned their attention to the exhibits lining either side of their route. For, by now, they had come to accept that this was what they were.

'I'm tired,' Vicki complained after a while. 'It isn't easy walking in this stuff.' She stamped her foot a couple of times, sending up little showers of white dust, and puffed out her cheeks to emphasise her point.

'Actually.' the Doctor said, 'the air is a bit rarified. It's that, rather than the sand, that makes walking such an exertion. I wonder how far it is now.'

Ian looked up at the colossal hull of the spaceship by which they had stopped. 'We must be nearly there,' he said.

'I remember seeing this on the scanner, with the buildings...' He looked around and then pointed: 'That way.'

'I wonder where this came from,' Vicki whispered, gazing at the awesome giant that towered above them.

'Who knows, Vicki?' Ian said. 'But I doubt it would ever get back there. Look at that rust. It must have been standing there for years.'

'Rust means moisture,' the Doctor chipped in. 'You were right, my boy, the planet may not be as dead as I thought. Unless, of course, the ship rusted on its journey here.'

Vicki gazed up at the gigantic wreck. It seemed too bulky to have been a fighting ship. A freighter maybe. She wondered what vast distances it had travelled and what its cargo could have been. On what far away planet had it been constructed? And what kind of creatures constituted its crew? What adventures did they have, and where were they now? She shuddered. 'It's so dead,' she said, 'Let's get away from here.'

'Yes, yes,' the Doctor agreed, 'Come on, you two.' And he and Vicki moved away.

Barbara turned to Ian. 'I think we should go back,' she said. Ian shook his head. 'We can't now.' He looked around, at the motley collection of obsolete and decaying high-tech that surrounded them, from satellites that would fit comfortably in the back of a shooting brake to

the huge ships from which, he imagined, a thousand or more ghosts were silently mocking him. ‘I have a terrible feeling that to go back would be more dangerous than to go on,’ he said.

The Doctor and Vicki were now some distance away and he remembered the Doctor’s admonition to stay together.

‘Come on, Barbara,’ he urged, and they set off after the others.

The building was further from their landing point than had appeared on the scanner and it took the little group some time to reach it. It was also much larger than they had expected. There appeared to be no fenestration and they found themselves standing before what appeared to be the only entrance: sliding doors, now closed, and with no indication of how they could be opened.

‘I wonder how we get in,’ the Doctor mused. ‘There seems to be absolutely no way of opening these doors.’

‘No bell marked *Caretaker*?’ Ian chuckled. But, like Queen Victoria, the Doctor was not amused.

‘Don’t make jokes, Chesterton,’ he snapped. ‘Make yourself useful instead. Look around for something.’

‘Like what? Like what?’ Ian gasped. He was finding it more and more difficult to breathe and was beginning to feel distinctly light-headed. ‘Maybe you’d like me to call the AA: "Excuse me, we’re stranded on this planet. There isn’t a living creature in sight. Would you come and pick us up please? How long will it take for you to get here? Oh, I see, about a hundred light years. Well, that’s fine, we’ll wait. We’re not going anywhere."’ Suddenly he wished he’d taken the Doctor’s advice and kept his mouth shut. He gasped for breath and the light-headedness turned into dizziness. There was a ringing in his ears and a myriad tiny lights flashed and danced before his eyes. His knees suddenly buckled and Barbara and the Doctor reached out just in time to stop him from falling.

‘Easy, my boy, easy,’ the Doctor said.

‘Sorry,’ Ian mumbled, ‘sorry.’

They supported him for a few moments until the dizzy spell passed.

‘I’m all right now,’ he said, ‘Thank you.’ His breathing was still laboured and shallow, through the open mouth, but he moved away

from their supporting hands to show that all was well.

‘Perhaps Ian is right,’ Vicki said, looking uneasily about her, ‘perhaps there isn’t anything alive here.’ She was beginning to feel a slight tingling sensation in her nostrils and the back of her throat and, almost unconsciously, caressed her neck with thumb and forefinger.

‘And there’s something else,’ Barbara added,

‘Something very peculiar. Have you noticed?’

‘Everything is peculiar,’ Ian said, but Vicki and the Doctor were both intrigued by Barbara’s question and wanted to know more.

‘It’s the silence,’ she said. ‘When we stop talking there isn’t a sound. Listen.’

Ian closed his mouth to stop the sound of his own breathing and they listened.

‘It’s the kind of silence you can almost hear,’ Barbara concluded.

‘More and more like a graveyard,’ Ian said.

‘Now, stop it! Stop it, the both of you,’ the Doctor ordered sternly. ‘You’ll all start imagining things. There’s always an expla -’ He stopped short as he noticed the sudden reaction on the faces of his companions and, looking around, saw the doors behind him slowly and silently sliding open.

‘Quick!’ he hissed, and the four darted to one side and flattened themselves against the building.

‘Did you see anything?’ Barbara whispered to Ian.

He nodded. ‘A very large room, and two men coming out.’

‘Men?’

‘Well, they look like men, in uniforms, white, with sort of red flashes across the chest. And they’re armed... I think.’ He nodded again. ‘They must have seen us.’

‘Well, we’ll soon find out, won’t we?’

‘Shhh!’ The Doctor put his finger to his lips to indicate silence and they waited. The doors were now wide open and, any moment,

somebody - or something - would emerge. It was then that Vicki felt the tickle in her nostril that presaged a violent sneeze. A moment later Barbara, forewarned by the sound of sudden short sharp intakes of breath beside her, hastily reached out and pressed her forefinger under Vicki's nose. The sneeze subsided and Vicki nodded to show the danger was passed. Barbara pursed her lips and would have whistled her relief but, at that moment the two men, as Ian had called them, appeared.

But the pair were human only to the casual observer.

Facially they resembled men, except for their hair which grew down to a point between their eyebrows, but their movement was strange. Their walk was a stiff, almost mechanical action that belied any flexibility at the knee or ankle, and their arms hung stiffly down. They stared straight ahead as they moved, and not even an explosive sneeze from Vicki, that caught her completely unawares, brought any reaction, much to the astonishment of all four travellers who waited breathlessly for the worst. They continued their slow steady march.

'They didn't hear it!' Barbara exclaimed, her eyes fixed on the backs of the departing creatures, still half expecting them to turn and challenge them. 'They didn't hear it!'

'Another mystery,' Ian said. 'They must he stone deaf.'

'Never mind the mystery.' The Doctor tugged at Ian's sleeve. 'Just thank our lucky stars we weren't caught. Now, let's get away from here quickly.'

'Maybe they're friendly,' Ian said.

'They don't look very friendly to me,' Vicki stated with absolute conviction. 'And I'm going to sneeze again.'

'In here, quick! While we've got the chance.' The Doctor let go of Ian's sleeve and darted through the open doors followed quickly by the others.

They were only just in time. Behind them the doors started to close.

They found themselves in a large room in which were transparent display cabinets containing unfamiliar artifacts, and objects too large for cover were free standing or mounted on plinths. From the room several arched openings led into other rooms.

‘You see?’ The Doctor said, ‘I was right. A museum. I recognise various things here. They come from different civilisations and different times. This room is, at a guess, a sort of lobby with just enough in it to whet a visitor’s appetite. No doubt we will find everything carefully catalogued and labelled. Fascinating, fascinating.’

He peered at the contents of one of the cabinets. ‘Space Tracers,’ he said. ‘Space Tracers. Come and look, come and look.’ Ian and Vicki studied the contents of the cabinet. All they could see were half a dozen miniscule slivers of metal.

Ian looked up enquiringly at the Doctor.

‘You don’t know what they are, do you?’ he said, raising both eyebrows. ‘Well, maybe you’d understand what I meant if I said, automatic pilot, hmm? Oh, not across five hundred miles, or even a thousand miles, but across millions. Oh, yes, micro-technology when your ancestors were still living in caves.’

‘There are no windows,’ Barbara said. The Doctor turned to her in some surprise to find she was surveying the room itself rather than its contents. He looked up at the ceiling.

‘No. There is something in the atmosphere probably with very slow destructive properties, the rust on the ships out there for example, that might explain the lack of windows. Everything in here is much better preserved.’

‘Then where is the light coming from?’ Barbara persisted. ‘I can’t see any light source.’

The Doctor shrugged. ‘Perhaps some fluorescent substance built into the fabric of the building,’ he said with some impatience. Scientific curiosity was one thing but why worry over such trivialities? He did wish people would get their priorities right.

‘It’s just crossed my mind,’ Ian butted in. ‘Supposing the TARDIS is little more than a pile of dust when we get back to it.’

‘ *If* we get back to it,’ Barbara added.

‘Don’t be silly!’ The Doctor snapped. ‘It takes ages for that sort of corrosion to take place.’

‘In which case,’ Ian smiled, ‘let’s enjoy the museum. I used to go to the Science Museum in South Kensington quite a lot. It’s almost like being

at home.'

'Except there are no men in blue uniforms to tell you not to touch anything,' Vicki laughed.

'Well, you just pretend there are, young lady, and keep your hands to yourself,' the Doctor ordered. 'We know nothing about the inhabitants of this place and I don't want to hear any alarm bells going off.'

'They're going off right now,' Ian said.

'What!' The Doctor almost screamed.

'In my head.'

'Making jokes again, Chesterton? Not in very good taste.

Not at all witty either.'

'It wasn't a joke,' Ian protested. 'I meant it. I don't like all this one little bit.'

But the Doctor had now lost all patience. 'Let's go through here,' he suggested and, suiting the action to the word, he marched through one of the openings, gave a little shriek and leapt with fright.

He had come face to face with a Dalek.

'Oh, my goodness gracious!' he gasped, holding his hand over his thumping heart. 'Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, what a start that gave me.'

His reaction had brought the other three running and now they stood around staring at the menacing object that brought back memories of terror to all but Vicki. She was merely curious. 'What is it?' she asked.

'A Dalek,' the Doctor replied. 'Or, at least, the casing for one.'

'Oh!' Vicki was intrigued. Is *that* what they look like?

Doesn't look very dangerous to me, rather like a giant pepperpot.'

'Well, the pepper that came from that pot sneezed a lot of people into another world, I can tell you,' Ian said with feeling. 'All I hope is we don't come across any live ones.'

Then, seeing the Doctor's look, he hastily added, 'Which, to say the

least, is extremely unlikely... I hope.'

Vicki reached out to give the Dalek a pat.

'Don't touch!' the Doctor barked.

'Oops! Sorry,' Vicki said. 'Forgot.'

The Doctor sighed, shook his head, and they moved further into the room.

'Well,' Barbara said after a few moments, 'apart from the Dalek it all seems quite ordinary to me.'

'No, it isn't,' Ian contradicted her. 'There's something peculiar you haven't thought of.'

'Oh?' Barbara looked at him quizzically.

'Yes, there is,' Ian said. 'Those two men we saw must have been guards, or curators, or custodians, or whatever, but we seem to be the only visitors. I wonder why.'

'Maybe it's not open to the public at the moment,' Vicki suggested. 'That's why the doors were closed. We shouldn't really be here.'

'You can say that again,' Ian said with even more feeling.

They had now almost traversed the length of the room and another arched opening lay ahead of them. The Doctor, anxious to move on and find the answers to all the questions that nagged him, went on ahead while the others straggled a little, distracted by the exhibits.

'Have you noticed?' Vicki said, 'None of the exhibits are labelled.'

'Hmm,' Ian pondered this for a while. 'Maybe, being a space museum, there is some other method of finding out what they are.'

'Why should that be?' Vicki asked.

'Well,' he answered, 'how many languages do we have on Earth? Hundreds. So how many do you suppose there must be...' He couldn't think of the right word: universal?

intergalactic? interstellar? So he waved his arms in a circular motion meant to embrace all communicating life forms.

Vicki nodded. ‘Yes,’ she said simply, ‘I suppose so.’

‘Well, well,’ Ian teased, ‘I’m glad I might have the right idea about something at last.’ And he was about to make a closer examination of one of the cabinets to see if there was anything to prove his theory when the Doctor bustled back into the room making urgent gestures with both hands:

‘Quick! Hide, hide! There’s somebody coming!’

With some alacrity, he disappeared behind a large plinth where he was immediately joined by the others just as two young men appeared in the doorway. These two were definitely more human-looking than the ones they had seen earlier. Each was dressed in a shabby, black, overall uniform, and unarmed. They were about the same age as Vicki, perhaps a little older, and there was something pathetic, even vulnerable about them. They stopped at the opening and looked around as if to make sure they were not being observed, then they stepped into the room and started to talk quite animatedly in full view of the four figures crouching behind the socle. But not a word of what they said could be heard and, after a few moments, they turned their backs on the room and disappeared the way they had come. The four rose slowly to their feet and looked at each other in utter bewilderment.

‘They were talking,’ Barbara whispered, asking for confirmation.

‘Undoubtedly,’ the Doctor agreed.

‘But we couldn’t hear a word!’

‘Perhaps,’ Ian suggested, ‘they have a different mode of communication. Or perhaps their hearing is pitched to a different frequency, so that they could hear each other, but we couldn’t hear them. Maybe, if we talked, they wouldn’t hear us.’

Barbara turned to the Doctor. ‘Is that possible?’ she asked.

‘I suppose it’s possible,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Chesterton could very well be right there.’

‘Two up to Chesterton,’ Ian murmured.

‘On the other hand, there could be some other explanation, and I’ve a feeling that there is. I’m also beginning to feel like my young friend here,’ - he laid a hand on Ian’s shoulder - ‘I don’t like it one little bit.

In fact, I have a nasty suspicion we are in for a big surprise.'

'Why?' Barbara demanded to know.

'Too many things unexplained. Too many things!' The Doctor almost exploded, waving an arm around the room, and he suddenly noticed that Vicki was behaving somewhat suspiciously a few yards away. His waving arm leading the way, he marched up to her.

'I thought I told you not to touch anything!' It was only a whisper but there was no mistaking the Doctor's anger.

Tirne Lords tend to bristle and behave like mere mortals when their orders are disobeyed, especially when they're already on tenterhooks, and Vicki's action was tantamount to mutiny in the ranks. She tried to control her smile before turning to meet the Doctor's accusing glare with an expression of bland innocence. It wasn't too often, rarely in fact, that someone had an opportunity to practise one-upmanship on the master.

'I'm *not* touching anything,' she said sweetly, and lost control of her face. The Doctor seemed to grow three inches taller before her eyes: not only disobedience, but contradiction! And how dare she find it amusing?

'Come, come, child,' he hissed, trying to maintain some composure. He hated it when his fingers trembled. 'I saw you. You had your hand on that cabinet.' He would have pointed to the object in question but was too aware of his agitation so inclined his head instead.

Vicki folded her arms. 'No,' she said.

The Doctor frowned, a frown meant to accentuate the glare and strike terror in the hearts of errant youngsters.

Not only disobedience and contradiction - his lips almost disappeared and a tiny vein in his temple began to bulge -

and silliness, but prevarication as well. 'Humph!' He snorted loudly.

Ian cast an anxious glance towards Barbara but she merely raised her shoulders and an accompanying eyebrow.

'Then why did you pull your hand away when you saw I had noticed you? You mustn't tell falsehoods.' Having gained control of his trembling, the Doctor now felt free to waggle an admonishing finger.

‘I’m not, honestly!’ Vicki protested, ‘I haven’t really touched anything. Look!’ She turned back to the cabinet and placed her hand on its transparent top. At least, for one moment, that was what she appeared to be doing. But the movement of her arm continued and her hand passed right through the cabinet to end up at her side. Her companions stared in disbelief. It was there, they all saw it, apparently as solid as their own bodies, and yet the girl’s hand had made no contact with anything.

‘You see?’ Vicki said, ‘There isn’t anything there to touch.’ She turned back to look at the Doctor. He was still frowning deeply but now it was one of concentration as he considered this latest phenomenon. He recognised none of the artifacts displayed inside this particular cabinet. There was nothing, as far as he could see, to indicate their period, point of origin, or function, if function they had. Were they from a time and place of which he had no knowledge?

They could be ornamental, though somehow he doubted it.

He could take them back to the TARDIS for analysis and identification, but how did one transport and analyse an optical illusion? ‘Incredible,’ he muttered, ‘quite, quite incredible.’

‘What do you make of it?’ Ian had finally found his voice but his question merely irritated the Doctor further simply because he had no answer.

‘I don’t make anything of it!’ he snapped.

‘Of course, there really is something there,’ Vicki volunteered, looking around and hoping, in her turn, for some confirmation. She didn’t like to think she might be hallucinating. ‘We can all see it! Can’t we?’

‘You should know better than to make rash statements like that,’ the Doctor replied, transferring his irritation to the ingenious Vicki who immediately looked suitably abashed.

But Ian leapt to Vicki’s defence. ‘Rash?’ he demanded.

‘Who wouldn’t make rash statements considering the pickle we’re in?

‘Pickle?’ The Doctor responded as though the idea they were in any danger had never entered his head. ‘What pickle?’

‘The pickle of playing twenty questions and having none of the answers,’ Ian replied. He started to count them off on his fingers.

‘Where are we? And don’t say in a museum. I want to know where the museum is. Why did the time clock malfunction? Why did our footprints disappear seconds after we’d made them? Why can’t we be heard when we make a noise and why can’t we hear others when they speak? Why do we see objects that aren’t there and...’

‘All right, all right,’ the Doctor held up a placating hand. ‘I apologise to Vicki. She did not make a rash statement. At least, she didn’t mean to, and I’m sure the answers...’

Ian felt suddenly drained. Although his breathing had returned to normal minutes after entering the museum, his legs began to feel very shaky and he started to lower himself onto a handy plinth in order to take a rest. He was half way to a sitting position when he straightened up again. If the plinth weren’t actually there he was going to look a right clown sprawled across the floor. ‘Well, what about this then?’ He walked over to another cabinet and placed his hand on it. It was as insubstantial as the first.

His hand passed right through it. He raised and lowered his hand a number of times. ‘It feels very odd,’ he said,

‘Just as if there were nothing there. Though Vicki’s right, of course,’ he insisted, ‘there *must* be something there.’

‘She is *not* right.’ A note of real anxiety had now crept into the Doctor’s voice. There was inherent danger in the situation and his mind was racing. But still he could not come up with an answer.

By now, Barbara had wandered off on her own to select another cabinet and experience for herself the peculiar sensation of trying to touch something that was not there.

The cabinet was a tall one containing a NASA spacesuit of the latter part of the twentieth century. The suit appeared to be in pristine condition. Barbara stared at the small Stars and Stripes on the chest and the name tag which read *DAVID HARTWELL*. She wondered what had happened to David Hartwell that his suit had ended up here. Her glance travelled upwards to the helmet: to the opaque, almost black visor staring back at her; ominous, menacing.

For a moment she imagined there was still someone in there, watching her. Did she see the suit move? Her heartbeat quickened. She took a deep breath and slowly extended her arm, her trembling fingers reaching out towards the case. She touched the surface - nothing. She touched the suit - nothing. Her hand went straight through it all. Ian

walked around to the opposite side and put his own hand through to grasp hers and, together, they walked free of the cabinet.

'What about that!' He cried, and Vicki, sensing his excitement, couldn't resist having another go herself.

'Watch me then!' She commanded and jauntily approached another tall cabinet containing an upright creature of saurian ugliness; a creature that, under normal circumstances, would most probably have terrified her out of her mind. Her air of happy confidence was bought to an abrupt halt when, with a little cry of pain, she slammed head first into an obviously solid object. Barbara and Ian burst out laughing, and even the Doctor couldn't resist a smile, as Vicki staggered back and stood there, ruefully rubbing her forehead.

'Well, that one's solid all right,' Ian exclaimed, stating the painfully obvious. Vicki glared at him. Her fright and the bump on her forehead were no laughing matter.

'So is this one,' Barbara added, running her hand over the surface of another cabinet.

'Are you all right, Vicki?' There was concern in the Doctor's voice.

'I think so,' Vicki nodded, though now she was tenderly touching the bruise on her forehead.

'That's a lesson to you all not to take things for granted.'

The Doctor hoped he didn't sound too pompous or self-righteous. Why was it he so often sounded that way when all he wanted to do was give good advice? He smiled benignly, hoping this would soften the expression, but no-one seemed to be paying any attention anyway. Vicki was still teasing her hurt, Ian was edging his way against a wall, examining it carefully, and Barbara seemed to be lost in thought. 'It's beyond me,' she said eventually, shaking her head. 'Why should some of these things have substance and not others?'

'At least, the building appears to be solid.' Ian pressed heavily with both palms against the wall. 'But, I agree, it doesn't seem to make any sense.' He turned away from the wall and started to move back towards his companions. But he hadn't taken more than a couple of steps when, with a sudden yell, he pitched forward and sprawled face down on the floor. Before anyone could move, he rolled over and sat up, moaning and rubbing his shin. 'There's something there,' he groaned. 'There's something there in that empty space.' He rolled up

his trouser leg to reveal a half inch cut on his shin and a bruise developing on the swelling surrounding it. 'Look at that!' he cried, pointing to the wounded leg which, to his secret satisfaction, was beginning to look rather gory. Ian let out another groan but, as nobody was making any attempt to baby him, he rolled down the trouser leg, got to his knees, leaned forward and gingerly stretched out his hand. Nothing. He tried again to one side, a little too forcibly and let out another yell, hastily withdrawing his hand and shaking his fingers. 'Now I've dislocated my finger!' he bawled, massaging his knuckle.

'Don't be such a big baby,' Barbara said with some exasperation.

'All men are when they're hurt,' Vicki proclaimed with all the wisdom of her years and somewhat enjoying Ian's discomforture. He scowled at her and reached out again, with a little more caution this time.

'It's cold to the touch, metal I would say.' He put out his other hand and his fingers curled around the invisible object. 'Cylindrical.' His hands moved up. 'Quite tall.' His hands moved down and then horizontally outwards. They watched him, fascinated. 'And this is what it's standing on.

This is what caught my shin.' He turned and looked up at the Doctor. 'Well?' he enquired, 'And what do you make of that?'

'There will be a logical explanation. There is a logical explanation for everything.' The Doctor assumed an urbane manner, trying to make up for his earlier testiness, though he was still deeply worried. 'It is merely a matter of taking the facts you know and putting them together to make another... fact... logical... fact. Let's find out what we have: firstly, we all have a black-out and, when we come to, we find the clock has isolated itself; then we find ourselves on a planet which gives every appearance of being nothing but a giant museum, where half the objects are solid and half are not, and some are solid but invisible, where we can see the inhabitants but can't hear them, and where we seem to be invisible to them.'

'You've left out the footprints,' Ian remarked dryly.

'And the glass of water!' Vicki added.

The Doctor looked at Barbara, waiting for her to acid her pennyworth, but she shook her head. 'So, what have we got then?' He nodded his head and rubbed the side of his nose. They waited expectantly for the facts to produce another fact but, when they failed to do so, Ian

decided to spur things on.

‘Well?’ he enquired.

The Doctor continued to nod his head and rub his nose.

Then he stopped the rubbing and tapped with his forefinger instead. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I think I’ve got it.’ But, before he could say what it was he had got, Vicki broke in with an urgent whisper.

‘There’s someone coming!’ She indicated the doorway at the end of the room, being the only one in a position to see through it, and hurriedly moving out of that position.

‘Good,’ the Doctor replied, ‘We might have a little more luck this time.’

‘Aren’t we going to hide?’ It was Barbara, now showing more than a trace of anxiety.

But the Doctor was all complacency. ‘Bearing in mind what happened last time we met the inhabitants of this planet there doesn’t appear to be much point in hiding.

Remember, we’re invisible,’ he said, giving them all the benefit of his most reassuring smile which didn’t reassure them at all. They turned back to look towards the doorway just as one of the young men they had seen earlier reappeared walking towards them. He still seemed apprehensive, glancing over his shoulder as though afraid of being followed. He was closing in on them fast.

‘Start talking,’ the Doctor commanded.

‘What for?’ Ian responded with some surprise. The Doctor really could be most extraordinary at times. Here they were on an unknown planet, faced with a creature who looked human but who, in all probability was not, and they were expected to start a conversation? Even if they did, the chance of the young man speaking English was probably billions to one, and they had already experienced their inability to hear him anyway. He felt the question was perfectly justified. The Doctor, on the other hand, did not.

‘Do as you’re told!’ he snapped. Why was everyone being so disobedient? ‘If they can’t see us, let’s try and make them hear us.’ He stepped into the path of the oncoming youth, waved his arms violently, and yelled;

‘Hey, you! You there! Stop!’ But the youth came on, looking straight towards the Doctor but seemingly oblivious to his presence, and the Doctor stepped aside to let him pass. Ian didn’t. The youth was approaching the other doorway when Ian ran ahead of him, turned, and planted himself firmly in his path. Ian saw every feature distinctly; the fair hair, the pale grey eyes, the grim expression on the slightly gaunt face. They were almost nose to nose. The next step and the boy would bump into him. But he didn’t. Instead he walked straight through Ian and disappeared into the adjoining room. Ian swung around to stare at his receding back and then turned around again to face the others. There was a shocked silence finally broken by Ian finding only part of his voice.

‘Did you see that?’ He squeaked, as if they could have missed it. ‘Did you see that? *He walked right through me*!’

‘Of course he did,’ the Doctor replied, as though it were a perfectly natural and everyday occurrence. ‘You’re not here. Let’s follow him. He may provide an answer to the whole mystery. Come on or we’ll lose him.’ The Doctor was already on his way and the others dutifully fell in behind, but not very happily.

‘All right, but I’d like to know what it is we’re following,’ Ian complained. ‘There isn’t much point in following something that isn’t there.’

‘Don’t be tiresome, Ian.’ The Doctor’s stride never lessened. ‘I didn’t say he wasn’t here. I said you’re not here.’

‘Oh, really?’ was the rejoinder. ‘Then just where am I supposed to be?’

‘I’ve told you about time dimensions before. Now do keep up. I don’t want to lose sight of that young man.’ And the Doctor disappeared through the doorway.

Ian stopped dead and turned an aggrieved face towards the girls: ‘What’s he on about? He never said anything to me about time dimensions.’

‘I don’t remember ever hearing anything about it,’

Barbara agreed.

‘How about you, Vicki?’ Ian turned to her.

‘Oh yes,’ she replied, with a slight air of smugness, ‘I know all about

it.'

'Do you now?' Legs astride, Ian placed his fists on his hips in the manner of Holbein's Henry the Eighth. It was meant to look impressive and accompany the slight note of sarcasm in his voice. 'Then maybe you'll be so good as to enlighten us.'

'Certainly,' was the confident response. Vicki wasn't in the least impressed with Ian's heroic stance. In fact, she thought it looked rather ridiculous. 'He was referring to the four dimensions of time. Time, like space, although a dimension in itself, also has dimensions of its own. We are existing in one dimension and that boy is in another. All right?'

Ian cast a slightly perplexed glance towards Barbara and then looked back at Vicki. 'Not really,' he said.

She smiled. 'And you a school teacher.'

'All right, there's no need to get hoity-toity,' Ian snorted,

'Well, it's like this...' Vicki said with elaborate patience, as though solemnly explaining some simple fact of life to a small child, 'What we're seeing hasn't happened yet, and we can't be seen because we're... Oh, it *is* a little confusing, isn't it?'

Ian responded with a satisfied smirk before Barbara's interjection wiped it from his face. 'I think we'd best get after the Doctor,' she suggested. 'And let him explain.' She moved quickly towards the doorway and the other two, unable to resist a sly glance at each other, followed.

They did not have far to go. The Doctor was standing only a few yards away inside the adjoining room. Arms folded across his chest he was engrossed in a pantomime being played out before him. This room was vast and the exhibits in it much larger. Among them, suspended from the ceiling, was a space shuttle - *The Robert E. Lee* - and, beneath it a number of young men, all in the black uniform, were engaged in what looked like a heated debate.

In their midst was the boy who, only a few minutes earlier, had nearly given Ian a heart attack by passing right through him. He was talking excitedly and pointing in the direction from which he had come and where the travellers were standing. The Doctor noticed his companions had joined him and inclined his head in the youth's direction.

‘As you’ll notice,’ he said, ‘he didn’t get very far. It would appear to be some sort of big pow-wow,’ - the Doctor was obviously under the influence of *The Robert E. Lee* -

‘And that boy is trying to impress something on the others.’

‘Why don’t we get closer?’ Ian suggested. ‘They can’t see us.’

‘Yes, I know,’ was the answer, ‘but there’s no point in tempting fate. We don’t know anything about them or how they would react to us so it wouldn’t do to suddenly materialise in their midst, now would it?’

‘Materialise!’ Ian cried. ‘What are you talking about?

I’m here, I’m real, I’m solid. I talk, I feel, I breathe, I’m alive! My leg hurts. The pain is real. *Cogito, ergo sum. Quod erat demonstrandum*. I don’t have to materialise!’

‘Yes you do,’ the Doctor replied calmly, pointing to the group of young men. ‘To them, when you arrive. So, we’ll just stay here and watch.’

‘Why do you think that one keeps pointing through there?’ Barbara asked. ‘Do you think he’s found the TARDIS?’

‘Of course not. If we haven’t arrived, the TARDIS

hasn’t arrived.’

‘Would someone *please* tell me what is going on!’ Ian insisted with increasing impatience. ‘Look, about this time dimension thing…’

‘Not now, Chesterton. We’ll just keep watching and see how events turn out.’

Ian folded his arms and gazed around the room. ‘I don’t know about anyone else,’ he said, ‘but I get a bit tired of dumb show after a while.’ And, as though to prove his point, he glanced over his shoulder. His arms fell to his sides. ‘Oh, heck!’ he whispered, ‘We’re in trouble. Doctor!’

He grabbed the Doctor’s sleeve and they all turned.

Marching towards them, through the room they had just left, was a squad of white uniforms, led by one who was obviously their officer and who already had his weapon drawn. ‘What do we do now?’ Ian hissed.

‘Nothing,’ the Doctor replied.

‘Well, I don’t fancy all that lot barging right through me.’

‘Then get out of the way and against the wall,’ the Doctor suggested.

They backed into the room and moved to one side as the guards, soldiers, or whatever they were, came to a halt just inside the doorway.

‘This is what the boy was trying to tell the others,’ the Doctor whispered, ‘And, for some reason, they wouldn’t listen to him.’

‘What can we do?’ Ian asked.

‘By the look on that man’s face,’ the Doctor indicated the leader, ‘I would say it’s too late to do anything.’ And the officer indeed looked as though he was going to enjoy what was about to happen.

The group beneath the space shuttle were standing silently, at least they were no longer talking, facing the soldiers, and the grim-faced squad looked back at them for what seemed to the travellers like an eternity. Then, suddenly, one of the youths bolted, running for the safety of a small door half-way down the length of one wall. The officer smiled, raised his arm, and a pencil thin ray of vivid blue light momentarily joined the two men before the fugitive was hurled into the air and crashed lifeless to the floor.

There was no battle. It was a massacre and all over in seconds. Only one youth remained alive, the one who had come to warn the others. There was simply no point in his trying to do anything. He stood stockstill as two soldiers advanced on him, seized him by the arms and manhandled him out of the room. The squad did an about turn and marched away. The officer, still smiling, took one last. look around the room, at the dozen bodies sprawled grotesquely across the floor, then he turned and followed his men.

‘That was horrible! Horrible!’ Vicki was crying and Barbara tried to comfort her, holding the young girl tight and caressing her hair soothingly.

‘Don’t let it upset you, Vicki,’ she said softly, ‘It wasn’t really happening.’

‘But it was! It was!’ Vicki cried.

‘Yes, indeed it was,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘Or, rather, it will. It might happen tomorrow, it might happen in a few years time, it might take place within minutes, but happen it most certainly will unless...’

‘What are we going to do?’ Ian broke in, his tone betraying his shock and fear.

‘We follow those soldiers, for want of a better word to describe them,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Providing nothing extraordinary happens that allows them or us to break through the field of time dimension, we’ll come to no harm. This way.’

They started to go but Ian could not resist a last look at the room where he had just witnessed such violence.

‘Doctor, look!’ He cried. The others turned back.

The bodies had disappeared.

‘It’s no good,’ Ian said, ‘Let’s face it, we have no idea which way they went and this place is like a maze or a rabbit warren. I’m completely lost. Does anyone recognise anything?’

Vicki pointed through a doorway. ‘Isn’t that the room we were in first?’ she asked. ‘I think it is. I think that’s the case I bumped my head on. I mean, who could forget a hideous creature like that?’

‘His mother probably loved him,’ Ian chuckled, almost back to his old jocular self. ‘But then, on second thoughts...’

Vicki was moving cautiously towards the doorway. ‘But there’s something different about it,’ she said. And then, pointing excitedly: ‘Look!’

There, in the centre of the room, stood the TARDIS.

Ian was the first to recover from the surprise. ‘Now, how did that get in here?’ he almost yelled.

‘And what does this do for your theory, Doctor?’

Barbara asked.

‘It supports it,’ was the brusque reply.

‘Whether it supports it or not,’ Ian argued, ‘Now that we have found the TARDIS, or it has found us, whichever way you care to look at it,

we must decide here and now what we're going to do.' Then: 'That's what I think,' he added as an apologetic afterthought.

'I think we should take it as a stroke of luck and leave at once,' Barbara suggested.

Ian eagerly seconded the motion.

The Doctor turned to Vicki. 'How do you feel, young lady?' he asked.

'I can't help thinking how awful it was back there.. those poor men.'

'Yes, yes, all very upsetting. And, as much as I would like to stay and unravel the strange events we have witnessed, I feel like you. The sooner we move away from this planet the better. And yet I also have a dreadful feeling it's not going to he that easy. Well...' - he waved an airy hand towards the TARDIS - 'Lead the way, Chesterton.'

It was only when Ian was at arm's length from the TARDIS that he suddenly realised what the Doctor had meant. He turned back to look at the others.

'Well, go on.' The Doctor encouraged.

'It's not there,' Ian said to himself, facing the Ship, 'I know it. It just isn't there.' Tentatively he reached out. His fingers met no resistance from the solid-looking blue police box.

'I should have known it, as soon as I saw it standing there.'

Ian heard the Doctor's voice behind him. We're never going to get away from here, he thought and, as if to confirm his feelings of hopelessness, there was a sudden piercing scream from Vicki. Ian swung around, as did Barbara and the Doctor, and Ian felt the hair prickle on his scalp as they gazed in horror at what they saw.

Against one wall, previously unnoticed in the excitement of discovering the TARDIS, stood four transparent domed casings, in shape like those the Victorians used to house dried flower arrangments or stuffed birds and animals. But the animals in the four casings were Ian, Barbara, Vicki, and the Doctor.

3

Discovery

It took some time for the shock to wear off and it was Barbara who, in

a stunned whisper, broke the silence.

‘Those... things... They’re us. Not models, not pictures...

They’re us.’

‘Yes,’ the Doctor said. ‘Exhibits in a museum.’

Ian turned to him. ‘Isn’t it about time you started putting those facts together, Doctor?’ His voice was trembling.

Now it was Vicki’s turn to whisper, almost to herself.

‘Time, like space, although a dimension in itself, also has dimensions of its own,’ she repeated.

The Doctor raised both eyebrows and gave a little nod.

‘Oh, so you know all about it, do you? You must have gone to a more enlightened school than these two taught at.’ ‘This is hardly the time for throwing insults about, Doctor,’ Ian huffed.

"We’re really in those cases,’ Vicki continued, mesmerised by her image staring back at her, almost oblivious to the others. ‘We’re just looking at ourselves from this dimension.’

Barbara shrugged. ‘It’s horrible. Those faces - our faces -

just staring.’

‘Does it explain all that’s been happening to us?’ Ian asked.

‘Of course it does.’ The Doctor took hold of his coat lapels and raised his chin slightly, a sure indication that he was about to pontificate. ‘If you’re not there you can’t leave footprints, can you? Or touch things.’

‘And you can’t be seen,’ Ian added.

‘Oh, you can be seen, my boy, you most certainly can be I seen.’ The Doctor released one lapel to point towards the cases. ‘There!’

‘Doctor...’ Barbara moved to his side. ‘Is there any way of getting out of this mess?’

The Doctor was fascinated by his *Doppelganger* and couldn’t take his eyes off himself. He moved in closer, leaning forward to peer into the case. ‘Well, we got into it Barbara, I suppose there must be some way

of trying to get out of it.' He straightened up and cocked his head to one side. 'I've never had an opportunity before of studying the fourth dimension at close hand. Fascinating. Quite fascinating.' He let go of the other lapel and, holding his hands in front of him, tapped his fingertips together. 'The TARDIS must have jumped a time track. Extraordinary.

Passed through into that dimension, this dimension, another dimension, which dimension?' He cleared his throat. 'Er... yes... Extraordinary. Hrnm...'

He looked around at the others all waiting eagerly for his conclusion so he took hold of his lapels again and this time his chin rose so high he was looking at the ceiling.

'There are obvious dangers of course but the answer is quite simple really.'

'Oh, I'm relieved to hear it,' Ian said. 'How simple?'

'Just a question of waiting, my boy,' was the simple answer.

'Waiting? For what?'

'Waiting for us to arrive.' The Doctor stopped investigating himself and, turning around, spread his arms wide to illustrate the simplicity of the solution.

'Pardon?' Barbara squeaked disbelievingly.

'My dear Barbara, before we were actually put in those cases we must have landed here in the TARDIS, been seen by these people and considered worthy enough subjects to grace their museum. But none of that has happened yet. What we are looking at, as with that fracas we saw earlier, is a glimpse into the future. Everything that leads up to it' -he indicated the four cases - 'is yet to come.'

'Couldn't we just go back to theTARDIS? The real one, I mean, and take off again?' Vicki pleaded.

'And run the risk of ending up like that?' the Doctor thundered. 'No, no, child, we must stay and face it, stop it from happening.'

'When do you suppose we might arrive?' Ian couldn't help feeling the question was a little on the ludicrous side since he was actually doing the asking but it was obvious his other body couldn't do the

questioning. Even had it been animate there would have been no aural contact.

But the Doctor didn't laugh. He merely shrugged.

'And how will we know when we have?' Barbara persisted. 'When we will have arrived, I mean.'

'Those' - again the Doctor indicated the bizarre exhibits 'will disappear and we will become visible. We will be able to hear the inhabitants of this place and be heard by them. And, when we touch something, it will be there.'

'And we're just going to wait?' Ian spread his hands in an imitation of one of the Doctor's gestures.

'Can you think of something better?'

'We could die of starvation!' Ian argued. 'Maybe that's what happened. Maybe that's how we ended up in... those!'

The Doctor shook his head. 'I don't think so,' he reasoned. 'If you will look again you will see we are wearing the same clothes, here...' - he pointed to himself -

'and there.' He gestured towards the cases. 'And if you look more closely, specifically at Ian's right trouser leg, the lower half, you will see a small bloodstain... Here... And there. No, I don't think we'll have too long to wait.'

Hands clasped behind his back, Lobos strolled slowly around the laboratory, trying to find something to arouse his interest and break the monotony of his existence. All his life he had been a fighter but, unlike a great many warriors, Lobos had a keen and enquiring mind. Winning battles had never been enough. He wanted to see everything, feel everything, learn everything. And here he was on this forsaken planet, his mind stultifying.

Nothing new had been added to the museum to excite his imagination and he was bored, bored, bored. He had done well for the Empire, earned himself considerable honours and yet, one tiny indiscretion, and this was his reward, to be banished to Xeros, the dullest planet in the Empire.

Oh, they could say it was putting the old warhorse out to graze - now where in Nuada had he picked up an expression like that? He tried to

remember but it was no use. In a life and career as long as his, one picked up all sorts of things - but, whichever way you looked at it, it was banishment.

One tiny indiscretion. All right, maybe it hadn't been that tiny, but a Morok has a heart hasn't he? Two, as a matter of fact. By the great Ork, at least his term as Governor was nearly over. Only one more metone, if he lasted that long, and he could go home.

Lobos saw in his mind's eye the beautiful shining city from which he had been so craftily exiled, and the beautiful face of the one who had been the cause of that exile. He suddenly thumped the work surface in front of him with the side of his fist, sending a tremor down its entire length, and causing the young technician working close by to visibly flinch. Lobos sighed and moved on. It was enough to make a lesser Morok very bitter.

Something... something... anything to break the hideous monotony.

He stopped in front of a scanner and passed his hand across the screen. That same dreary landscape. Those same dreary, crumbling relics that no one visited any more.

Except for the labour ship on its regular tour of duty, bringing supplies and taking back with it the requisite number of Xeron slaves and his reports - reports that had nothing to say and which no-one probably took any notice of anyway - he couldn't remember when last he saw a new face. Who was it? He racked his brains. Oh, yes, the Ometec Ambassador, and he couldn't get away fast enough.

Not that he was all that bright anyway. If he had stayed the conversation would have languished soon enough. He passed his hand over the screen again to see if there was anything new to look at elsewhere. Not that he really expected it but one never could tell. There could be visitors, maybe someone he could have an intelligent conversation with. His second-in-command didn't have the brains of a Flebbit and they were brainless enough.

You could transplant twenty Flebbit brains into a Morok's skull and there would still be room inside for a Gambo to orbit.

Nothing. The space station was deserted. Xeros was the forgotten planet, left to rot. This once great monument to the glories of the mighty Morok Empire: their civilisation, achievements, conquests; rotting and forgotten, just as he felt himself to be rotting and forgotten.

He lowered himself heavily into the seat in front of the scanner. Maybe, later, he could have a game of chess with his favourite robot, Matt. Chess fascinated him, ever since he had accidentally discovered a set tucked away in storage

- who knows how long it had been there? - and wondered what it could be. Obviously a pastime of some kind, but from where? And what were the rules? Having decided it was a game of attack, defence, and counter-attack, it excited his military mind and he eventually threw it to Matt and told the robot to get on with sorting it out. Matt did just that - in .00001 of a second. And then offered Lobos a game. For a while chess was a total obsession and, even when the obsession wore off, Lobos could never be bored playing with Matt for the simple reason that he was never able to win. Matt was the first adversary who had him totally licked and, no matter how much he studied, how hard he tried, he could not win. It was probably just as well. Had he ever beaten Matt, the game would have lost its fascination. Yes, maybe he would have a game later.

He sighed wearily and passed his hand over the screen to change the location. Then he sat, looking but not seeing, lost in a thousand thoughts.

'Where's Vicki?' The Doctor had taken in the room even before the echo of his call had died away.

Startled, the others glanced around as well. There was no sign of Vicki. For a while they had been wandering about the room, examining the exhibits and only occasionally aware of each other. One minute Vicki was there and, it seemed, the next minute she was gone.

'She probably got bored and wandered off,' Barbara suggested.

'Expressly against my orders. Now, more than ever, we should stay together.' And chuntering angrily to himself the Doctor marched off and into the next room. The other two quickly followed and they found themselves in a long gallery filled with models and illustrations of planetary systems. They moved cautiously down the centre of the gallery keeping a sharp look-out for the errant Vicki.

'What could have happened to her?' Ian grumbled. 'She couldn't have got very far.'

There was a sudden gasp from Barbara and she pointed to the far end of the gallery where a wide, arched opening revealed a corridor running at right angles to the room they were in.

‘There she is!’

The Doctor and Ian turned towards the corridor where they saw Vicki being dragged along by two of the white uniforms. She was struggling desperately and obviously screaming but the trio could hear nothing. ‘Do something!’

Barbara cried.

‘There’s nothing we can do,’ the Doctor said. Barbara turned a desperate pleading face to Ian. He needed no second bidding.

‘Ian! Come back!’ The Doctor shouted, but it was too late. Ian was already in the corridor and, with the advantage of surprise, had barged into the two captors and sent them crashing to the floor before they even knew what hit them. Barbara and the Doctor saw him yelling at Vicki, pulling and then pushing her in their direction and Vicki ran back into the gallery, throwing herself at Barbara and sobbing hysterically.

The guards, now recovered and back on their feet, stood glaring at Ian who started to back slowly towards the gallery. In a second they had drawn their weapons but, as they raised them to fire, a look of total astonishment appeared on their faces. Ian had stepped back into the gallery and, as far as the Moroks were concerned, disappeared.

His heart thumping like a kettledrum, Ian staggered back to the others on rubberised legs. His hands were trembling and he could hardly speak but, ‘Phew! That was too close for comfort,’ he chuckled with relief. ‘Well done, Chesterton, my boy. Well done!’ The Doctor beamed. But the congratulations were cut short by a low warning from Barbara: ‘Doctor...’

The Moroks had entered the gallery and were slowly advancing, peering left and right for the magically disappearing fugitive. The four time-travellers retreated in apprehension. But, after a while, the searchers gave up their hopeless quest and, shaking their heads in disbelief, started to go. At the arch they could not resist one last look around the gallery and then, with shrugging shoulders, disappeared.

‘That’s certainly given them something to think about,’

Ian said.

Barbara giggled nervously. ‘They’ll never work out what happened,’ she said. ‘You could almost feel sorry for them.’

‘No, no!’ Vicki cried, ‘They were horrible!’

‘Yes, Vicki. I’m sorry.’

‘Teach you to disobey orders and go wandering about on your own like that,’ the Doctor chided her. ‘Created quite a little drama, didn’t you?’

‘And how do you explain that little drama?’ Ian asked.

‘It’s quite simple,’ the Doctor began, but Ian was still suffering from the shock of being an impulsive hero and staring oblivion in the face, and was in no mood for any more simplicity.

‘Whenever you say something is quite simple,’ he blurted out, ‘it turns out to be the most complicated thing ever. Whenever I hear you say "It’s quite simple" I prepare for the worst.’

‘But it is!’ the Doctor insisted. ‘You both entered and came back from the fourth dimension, that’s all.’

‘That’s all. It couldn’t have been sheer coincidence, I suppose, that we happened to step in and out again when things began to get really difficult.’

‘Of course not. Your experience merely substantiates my theory that there is accidental mechanical interference on this planet. It would appear to be in patches, like fog, and like fog, it comes and goes. At the moment that corridor through there seems to be a location. In here there could be people all around us at this very moment but we are unaware of them because they are in their dimension while we are in ours.’

‘But we’re not!’ Ian almost exploded. ‘We’re in both!

We’re here but we haven’t arrived. We’ve arrived but we’re not here. I think I’m getting a headache.’

‘It’s quite sim...’ The Doctor stopped himself and coughed. ‘Crossed wires, dear boy. Crossed wires. But I also think what has just happened presages our imminent arrival and we really ought to get back to the other room and keep an eye...’ He couldn’t resist a little more teasing -

‘on our other selves.’

‘I suddenly feel very sleepy,’ Vicky said, unsuccessfully trying to stifle a yawn and forgetting to put her hand over her mouth until the very last moment. ‘Pardon.’

‘Oh, Vicki,’ Barbara said, ‘you can’t be. We all had that marvellous sleep before we landed.’

‘We haven’t landed yet.’ Ian was determined to continue the argument. ‘And, if we have, then I’m Rip van Winkle and I haven’t a clue as to what is going on.’

‘I can’t help it,’ Vicki insisted, ‘I really am tired.’ And she yawned again, this time remembering her manners. ‘’S’funny,’ Ian said, ‘so am I.’

The Doctor, who was leading the way, stopped and turned back. ‘That’s very interesting,’ he observed.

‘You always show the greatest interest in the least important things,’ Ian growled sulkily.

‘It’s the apparently least important things that sometime lead to the greatest discoveries. Steam corning out of a kettle, hey? An apple falling on your head, hey? Floating in a hot bath, hey?’

‘Hey?’

The Doctor raised his right fist and jabbed his forefinger at the ceiling. ‘ *Eureka*, my young friend. *Eureka*!’

‘ *Touché*,’ was the rejoinder. Ian was too tired to argue anymore.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor said, continuing on his way, ‘I remember, I was sitting on the edge of the bath at the time and we were discussing... What were we discussing?... Oh, yes! The cost of living and the exorbitant cost of figs.

Almost tripled in price they had, in a matter of months.

Terrible, terrible.’

‘What is he going on about?’ Vicki whispered to Barbara.

‘Recollections of a dim and distant past,’ Barbara answered.

‘Never mind the dim and distant past,’ Ian snarled, ‘it’s the dim and distant future we’re supposed to be worrying about.’ And he yawned

mightily just as they went through into the other room.

‘Your tiredness;’ the Doctor said, getting back on track and to his original interest, ‘obviously has something to do with moving into another dimension. How do you feel, Barbara?’

‘I’m wide awake,’ she replied.

‘So am I. Remind me to make some notes about this.’

‘I hate to interrupt,’ Ian interrupted, ‘but Vicki and I are almost dead on our feet.’ And, in truth, they could hardly keep their eyes open and the yawning had become incessant.

‘My dear boy, forgive me, scientific curiosity, you know.

You can rest in here.’

Through half-closed eyelids Ian peered around the room. The TARDIS and the domed cases were still there.

He lowered himself wearily to the floor and stretched out.

‘Wake me when we arrive,’ he murmured and was almost immediately fast asleep. Vicki, already curled up into a little ball, was ahead of him. Barbara lay down beside her and the Doctor stood where he was, obviously lost in thought.

Lobos leaned forward and changed the picture once more.

Suddenly he stiffened and peered intently at the screen.

There was something there, something he had never seen before. Two of his men were walking around it. Then one, pointing to the ground, said something to the other who joined him and they jabbered excitedly before turning back and resuming their examination of the strange contraption.

‘You!’ Lobos bellowed at the young technician who, in terror, dropped the exhibit he was working on and totally ruined a hundred Morok-hours of work.

‘What’s that?’ Lohos demanded, stabbing a stubby finger at the screen.

‘Wh-wh-what, sir?’

‘That, you idiot! That!’ Lobos grabbed the youth by his collar and

practically jammed his nose against the scanner.

‘I don’t know, sir. I don’t reco-recollect ever seeing it before.’

‘Well, have you seen anything like it?’

‘N-n-n-no, sir, never, sir.’ Much to the young Morok’s relief, Lobos let go of his collar, and he surreptitiously backed away out of arm’s reach. It was at this point that the door to the laboratory slid silently open and a soldier hurried in. Lobos turned and glared at him. The soldier saluted.

‘I am supposed to be the Governor of this wretched planet,’ Lobos grumbled. ‘And you’re supposed to show some respect and announce yourself.’

‘I’m sorry, sir, but the matter’s urgent.’

‘Not so urgent that you forget your place.’

‘Yes, sir. I apologise, sir.’ The soldier stared straight ahead, waiting for the blow to fall.

Lobos looked the creature up and down and felt some sympathy for him. Maybe the poor fellow was as bored as he was and here, at last, was something to get excited about.

‘Well?’ He barked. ‘Out with it then. What is this matter that’s so urgent?’

The soldier almost sighed with relief. ‘We’ve had a report that a ship has landed, sir.’

‘I am well aware that a ship has landed.’ Lobos waved towards the scanner without bothering to turn and look at it. ‘And it isn’t a ship from home. We would have had advance notification.’ By Ork, he was beginning to sound more and more like a civil servant.

‘No, sir. It’s an alien vessel.’

‘Well, well, well, what a red letter day...’

Now where had he picked up *that* expression? - ‘...

for the Xeron calendar. Have the crew been detained?’

‘No, sir. We have been unable to.gain admission...’

‘Admission?’

‘Entry, sir, entry. Unable to gain entry.’

Lobos glowered with such ferocity that the soldier decided he had better get his message across and get out of there - fast.

‘But the ship appears to be unmanned, sir. There are tracks leading away from it and we presume the crew must be somewhere in the museum.’

Lobos moved over to the door and flicked an intercom switch on the wall. ‘Attention all commanders. Attention all commanders. We have uninvited guests. Organise an immediate search and detain for questioning.’

He flicked off the switch. At last, he thought, something to break the monotony.

Bo interlaced his fingers and stretched out his arms in front of him, palms outwards, and cracked his knuckles loudly. He made funny noises with his mouth, forcing the air out from between his cheeks and gums. It was a habit that drove Sita mad and he tried to control his irritation.

They were both on tenterhooks and any reprimand, he knew, would only increase the tension unbearably. But he turned his head sideways to look at his companion and Bo, realising what he was doing, immediately stopped and smiled apologetically. Then he sat on his hands to resist further temptation.

‘What could have happened to him?’ Sita said, using his own hands to put pressure on his thighs and push himself up from the cannister on which he was sitting and going towards the door of the tiny chamber to look out. Ahead of him stretched the vast underground complex that was the heart and lungs of the museum. The only sound that greeted him was the low hum of machinery and nothing moved. He turned back. Bo was gazing at him enquiringly.

Sita shook his head and resumed his seat. ‘Something must have happened to him,’ he said. ‘The Moroks have picked him up for questioning...’

‘No!’ Bo shouted. And his hands came together again ready for cracking knuckles.

‘Nothing gets past them,’ Sita continued. ‘They know everything.’

‘But we’ve been so careful,’ Bo protested, feeling the fear spread from his solar plexus, reaching out to his toes and fingertips.

‘They know what we’re thinking even before we do.

We’re fools. Fools! I told Tor we wouldn’t get away with it.’ Sita clenched his fists and shook them in front of him.

‘But we’ve planned,’ Bo whined.

‘Planned? Planned? What have we planned? What kind of rebels are we? We don’t even have weapons.’

‘But we do!’ Bo shouted.

Sita waved away the protestation and continued: ‘The few weapons we have wouldn’t get us anywhere. Oh, maybe we’d get two or three of them, then it would be slaughter.

Not one of us would be left alive. Not one of us would want to be left alive.’

‘I suppose some of us must die,’ Bo whispered, ‘but...’

‘Be quiet!’ Sita yelled. ‘I don’t want to hear it!’ Then he suddenly felt sorry for his young companion. He was not the stuff fighters, rebels, martyrs, are made of, and he was gazing at Sita pleading to be reassured. Sita could not reassure him. He turned away and the sound of knuckles cracking made him close his eyes and wish fervently he were anywhere but where he was. ‘If he doesn’t come soon,’

he said softly, ‘we’ll have to call the meeting off. We will be missed.’

‘He’ll be here,’ Bo said, sitting on his hands again. ‘Tor wouldn’t let us down.’

The Doctor knelt beside Ian and shook his shoulder gently. It took Ian a long time to come round but, eventually, he groaned, opened his bleary eyes and immediately closed them again.

‘What’s the matter?’ he yawned and rolled over prepared to go to sleep again. But the Doctor gave him another shake.

‘You told me to wake you when we arrived,’ he said quietly.

There was a moment and then Ian sat bolt upright, immediately wide awake: ‘What!’

‘Shhhh…’ The Doctor put his finger to his lips. ‘The girls are still asleep. No need to wake them yet. But, look…’

Ian looked. The TARDIS had gone. So had the four cases. The Doctor stood up and Ian scrambled hastily to his feet.

‘What…?’ he started, and then remembered that, having arrived, he could now be heard as well as seen and lowered his voice almost to a whisper. ‘What do we do now?’

‘Well…’ The Doctor pulled at his lips and cleared his throat. ‘Sooner or later the TARDIS is going to be discovered, that is, if it already hasn’t, and they’re going to come looking for us. I suggest we find somewhere to secrete ourselves while we formulate a plan.’ It was obvious from the Doctor’s diction that he was desperately awaiting the arrival of a moment of inspiration and that moment was reluctant to show itself. ‘If we stay here we’ll be caught out in the open, as it were. Yes, I’ll wake the girls,’ he finished lamely.

‘Right.’ Ian nodded and, as the Doctor knelt beside the sleeping Barbara and Vicki, he crossed over to a cabinet to examine its contents. He stood in front of the cabinet and immediately a voice seemed to explode in the room.

‘You are now looking at weapons from the planet Verticulus. They are all based on the laser principle and though somewhat primitive in concept are extremely effective at close range. If you look…’

Ian stepped back, his heel coming down heavily on Barbara’s toe. She let out a gasp and hopped on the other foot, grimacing in pain. ‘Sorry,’ Ian apologised. He hadn’t realised the others had moved up behind him.

‘So that’s how we find out what it is we’re looking at,’

Vicki observed.

‘Yes,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘There is obviously a sensor that reacts to the body’s presence and gives out a commentary.’

‘But it’s in English!’ Vicki cried.

‘There will be an explanation for that,’ the Doctor said.

Ian positioned himself on one side of the cabinet and indicated the opposite side to Barbara. 'Help me off with the top,' he ordered.

'What for?' Barbara asked, moving into position nevertheless and laying her hands on the lid.

'You might set off an alarm,' Vicki warned.

But Ian ignored her advice and he and Barbara removed the top. 'If they still work,' Ian explained, 'At least we'll be armed. And, if they don't, we might be able to bluff our way out.' They laid the lid on the floor and Ian selected a weapon.

'Nonsense!' The Doctor said, 'We've got a serious problem on our hands. This is no time to be playing cowboys and Indians.'

'And we don't want to get out anyway,' Barbara added.

'Do we? At least, not yet.'

'Well, we can't stay here, Barbara!' Vicki almost howled.

'We've got to, Vicki,' Barbara persisted. 'We've got to break the chain of events, do whatever we have to, to keep ourselves out of those cases.'

'I can't see that staying here would stop it!'

'Leaving here may be just what we're not supposed to do,' Barbara explained.

'I'm afraid, my dear, Barbara's quite right,' the Doctor said. But Vicki was not to be convinced.

'But what if staying here is what we're *not* supposed to do?' she argued. 'Why don't we just try and get back to the TARDIS and leave altogether? Then we won't have to worry at all about being turned into dummies.'

'It's a valid argument, Doctor,' Ian said. 'It really is a case of six of one, half a dozen of t'other.'

'Not really,' Barbara chipped in again, 'Even if we do escape the planet we would never be quite sure we were really free, or whether we would still be bound by time, and events in time, which would lead us back here and into those glass cases. If we stay we might, at least, be able to reshape the future, turn events to our advantage,

make sure we don't end up like that. Then we could safely leave.'

'Hmm... It's quite a problem, quite a problem,' the Doctor muttered.

'All right then,' Vicki said with finality. 'You decide.'

'Decide?' The Doctor looked quite startled. 'My dear child, it's as Ian said, six of one and half a dozen of the other. Spinning a coin would be as appropriate as making a decision. Hmm, now let me see...' The Doctor caressed his chin. 'What kind of creatures would want to put us in cases for the purpose of display? I wonder...'

'He's curious,' Barbara whispered to Vicki, 'that means we stay.'

'I've lost a button,' Ian said, holding up his arm and looking at his cuff. He pulled at the remaining thread.

'Must have been on the cabinet, reaching for the gun.'

'Lost a button?' The Doctor stopped stroking his chin and examined the sleeve with intense curiosity. 'Now that's interesting, very interesting.'

Ian rolled his eyes heavenwards. 'What is so interesting about losing a button? People lose buttons, by the millions I shouldn't wonder. In fact I'm thinking of taking out shares in the button industry and going around snipping off people's buttons.' The Doctor really did have the most extraordinary convoluted thought process. *Buttons*!

'Don't be so facetious,' the Doctor snapped back. 'Don't you see, in this case, a little thing like losing a button can be a clue to our whole course of action, even our future?'

'For want of a nail a war was lost,' Vicki misquoted smugly.

'What?' Ian said.

'For want of a nail a shoe was lost, for want of a shoe a horse was lost, for want of a horse a battle was lost, for want...'

'All right, all right,' the Doctor butted in. 'Did anyone notice whether or not the button was missing from the sleeve when we were in the cases? Hmm? Well, come on!

Come on!'

Nobody had. Missing buttons were hardly what they were looking for.

‘Pity, pity,’ the Doctor sighed, shaking his head. ‘Well then, let’s not waste time here talking. First things first.

We will leave this building. Well...’ he chuckled, ‘a museum is hardly the place for shaping futures, is it?’

Lobos sat at his desk and excitedly switched pictures in quick succession. He was anxious to get his first glimpse of these aliens. His second-in-command, Ogrek, stood behind him, watching.

Through the scanner they could see the museum and its environs were a hive of activity with white uniforms scurrying about in all directions. Ogrek grunted. ‘We won’t be the only ones looking for them,’ he muttered. ‘They could have already been found and smuggled into hiding by the rebels.’

‘Rebels?’ Lobos snorted. ‘Rabble, you mean, little more than children.’

‘Children grow up,’ Ogrek commented wryly. ‘And even as children they can be dangerous.’

‘By then they will be on their way to Morok in the labour ship. And, in the meantime, if and when they pose a danger, we will destroy them. Nevertheless you’re right about the fact they might try to make contact. If they do of course...’ he smiled... ‘We’ll bag ‘em all at once, won’t we?

In the meantime, send Matt down to survey that ship and see what he comes up with.’

Tor sped down an alleyway of the underground complex and burst into the chamber where Bo and Sita were waiting. He was breathing hard; a combination of exertion, excitement, and fear of discovery. Xerons never ran, except under orders or suspicious circumstances, and being apprehended would mean questioning. The waiting duo leapt to their feet, their own hearts thumping, and Bo almost cried with relief when he saw who it was.

‘Tor! What’s happened?’

Tor held out his hand to indicate he was giving himself a second or two to regain his breath. Then he looked around to make sure he hadn’t been followed and, staying by the door, said, ‘The Moroks have discovered a spaceship. It landed here.’

‘Where?’ Sita asked.

‘Near the Omerion section.’

‘You went *outside*?’ Bo was aghast that his friend and leader should take such a risk. Xerons did not move outside their prescribed limits.

‘A ship,’ Sita said unbelievingly. ‘Where from?’

Tor shook his head. ‘Nobody knows. But the crew have left it, that I did hear.’ He glanced over his shoulder then moved further into the chamber and continued in a hushed but excited voice. ‘This could be our chance,’ he said.

‘Don’t you see? They will have weapons we can use against the Moroks.’

‘If they’ll agree to help us,’ Sita said doubtfully. ‘And I don’t see any reason why they should.’

‘They will, Sita, when they hear our story.’

‘Yes,’ Bo agreed.

Sita shook his head. ‘Who knows what they’re like?

They could be worse than the Moroks, then where will we be?’

‘You’re such a pessimist,’ Bo complained, moving closer to Tor to show where his trust lay. ‘You always look on the dark side.’

‘Not really,’ Sita argued with a slight shrug. ‘It’s just that I am a realist. Look, you said the Moroks have found the ship. I)o you really think we stand a chance of finding whoever they are before the Moroks do?’

‘Dako has already organised the outside workers,’ Tor replied. ‘Now we must search in here. Olem and Seng are waiting for us. Come.’ He stood by the door waiting for Sita to move.

‘Come on, Sita.’ Bo laid a hand on Sita’s shoulder and gave it an encouraging shake. ‘We’ll find them.’

The Doctor, leading the way down the corridor, suddenly stopped and raised his hand. The others dutifully stopped behind him though they couldn’t figure out exactly why.

Except for themselves the corridor was empty and they hadn’t seen or heard anything suspicious. Ian and Barbara exchanged enquiring

glances and Ian shrugged, then they both turned front again to stare at the back of the Doctor's head. Had they been in a position to see his face they would have seen his eyes move left, then right, then left again, though he took great care to keep his head absolutely still. Finally he said, 'You lead now, Chesterton.'

Ian and Barbara exchanged glances again, and smiled, as they both nodded slowly, realising the Doctor was hopelessly lost and didn't want to admit it.

'Certainly, Doctor,' Ian agreed affably, stepping to the Doctor's side. 'Which way? Any particular fancy?' And the Doctor knew he hadn't fooled anybody.

He huffed for a while and then said, 'Yes - the way we came in of course.'

'Of course.' Ian smiled and nodded. 'And which way did we come in?'

'Really, young man,' the Doctor growled. 'You've got a memory like a sieve. We turn right, then left.'

'No,' Vicki contradicted. 'We turned right when we came in.'

She had been examining one of the exhibits with great interest; a small furry creature, very cuddly, like a teddy bear, except that its teeth would have snapped off a man's leg with one bite. Her curiosity was thoroughly piqued but she made sure she didn't stand too close, not because of the teeth, but because of the sensor and the voice that she knew would be sent booming down the corridor. Having given her considered opinion on their position she turned back to the exhibit.

'Turned right?' the Doctor said. 'No, I don't think so.'

'All these doors and corridors are so alike,' Barbara said hastily in an attempt to abort the incipient argument.

'Yes, indeed they are,' the Doctor agreed, taking the way out she offered him.

'Is this your way of admitting you're as lost as we are?'

Ian enquired sweetly.

The Doctor considered for a moment and then, 'I suppose it is,' he said. 'Let's take Vicki's advice. We can always retrace our steps.'

‘Can we? All right then, follow me.’ And Ian, holding his purloined weapon at the ready, set off down the corridor.

‘By the whole Morok Empire!’ Lobos bawled, smashing his fist down on the desk in front of him, ‘How long is it supposed to take to round up a few fugitives?’

‘How do we know they’re only a few?’ Ogrek, unlike the governor, was not looking for excitement. He was a creature of dull habit and did not relish his routine being disturbed.

‘I don’t care how many there are, I want them now!’

Lobos thundered.

‘And I say "a few" because how many do you think could fit into that thing?’ He switched his screen to a picture of the TARDIS and then to a quick succession of computer graphics. Having satisfied himself as to the dimensions of the strange ship, he switched to a hologram and the image of the TARDIS stood there before them. ‘You see? You see? Look at the size of it.’

Ogrek was not impressed. ‘They could be a whole colony,’ he said.

‘Maybe that’s why we haven’t discovered them. We’re looking for something more or less our size and they could be no bigger than that.’ Ogrek held up his hand, thumb and forefinger practically together.

‘Well we’ll soon know,’ Lobos said as a voice interrupted them.

‘213745 wishing to report, sir.’

‘Enter.’ Lobos turned to face the door as it slid open.

213745 entered and saluted. ‘Well?’ Lobos barked.

‘Robot number 9284...’

‘His name is Matt,’ Lobos said.

The soldier frowned. ‘Matt?’

‘That’s right. His name is Matt. So forget the number, just tell me what he’s come up with.’

The soldier gulped. ‘Nothing, sir.’

‘What?’

‘Nothing. He’s still working on it.’

Lobos cast a quick glance at Ogrek who immediately wiped the smile from his face and found something very interesting to look at on the ceiling. But what was happening at ground level was even more interesting for, far from being annoyed, Lobos was highly delighted and Ogrek was quite startled when, hearing what sounded suspiciously like a chuckle, he looked down again to find Lobos grinning broadly. He raised a questioning eyebrow and Lobos burst into laughter.

‘He’s been beaten!’ he yelled. ‘Matt has finally met his match. He doesn’t know the answers! Now I can’t wait to meet these aliens.’ He pointed a finger at Ogrek. ‘So you take personal charge and get on with it.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Ogrek sighed - he only called the governor

‘sir’ when he felt put upon - and, waving 213745 to go ahead of him, turned to leave.

213745 saluted smartly but Lobos didn’t even see it. He was once again wrapped up in his video search.

‘If we keep going,’ Ian declared, a note of desperation in his voice, ‘We must eventually come to an exit.’

‘Must we?’ Barbara said between clenched teeth.

‘Well, we got in, didn’t we? So we must be able to get out,’ Ian hissed back.

‘I’m not so sure. I think we’re going around in circles.

We’ve been in this corridor before, I know we have!’ There was more than a hint of desperation in Barbara’s voice.

Now a note of hysteria was creeping in. ‘I never thought I’d suffer from claustrophobia but I want to get out of this place!’

‘Easy, easy,’ the Doctor said soothingly in an attempt to lower the temperature. ‘I too have the distinct impression that we’ve been here before but it’s not a calamity. Oh, no.

It’s helped me orientate myself. I know exactly where we are.’

‘Do you?’ Ian snapped, waving the muzzle of his ray gun in all directions. ‘Which way then?’

The expression of happy confidence on the Doctor’s face disappeared. But Vicki jumped to the rescue. ‘Straight ahead?’

‘Straight ahead,’ he agreed.

They moved warily down the corridor. Behind them the three Xerons suddenly appeared from around a corner and quickly ducked back again.

‘They’re armed!’ Sita whispered.

‘I’ll see which way they go, then we’ll try to cut them off,’ Tor replied.

‘The one had a ray gun! I saw it!’

‘So? We were hoping they’d be armed, if you remember.’

‘That’s all very well, but how do you know they’re friendly? They could shoot us on sight. They could be Morok allies!’

‘The Moroks wouldn’t be searching for them if they were allies.’

But Sita’s trepidation was not to be so easily assuaged.

‘They could still he aggressive,’ he insisted, his courage really beginning to let him down. ‘And you don’t know the Moroks are searching for them. We have to be cautious.’

‘We will be.’

‘How?’

‘We’ll make contact before we show ourselves.’

‘How?’

‘Capture either the old one or the very young one. We can talk to them. Then, if everything looks all right, let them introduce us to the others. Is it agreed?’

‘Agreed!’ said Bo.

‘All right.’ Tor held up his hand for the others to hold back while he took a quick look into the corridor.

‘They’ve gone to the left,’ he informed his companions,

‘We’ll cut through the Triphid Section. Come on.’

Barbara hugged herself, not from cold, and shivered violently. ‘I hate to admit it,’ she said, her voice trembling,

‘But I am scared, really scared. They must have found the TARDIS by now; why has no-one come?’

‘I should think, by mere chance, we’ve been lucky enough to avoid them so far,’ Ian suggested, ‘But I don’t reckon on our luck lasting too long. What I can’t understand is why they don’t have a security system. You know, something like automatic surveillance system in every room.’

‘There was no alarm on that case you took the gun from,’ Vicki pointed out.’

‘No, that’s right!’

‘The whole planet’s probably so secure maybe they feel they don’t need one,’ Vicki continued. ‘Who’s going to steal anything from this place? They’ve probably got a customs post at the point of departure. And just as you’re going out through the green exit a voice behind you will say, "Excuse me, Earth people, have you anything to declare?" And then you’ll have to say, "Yes, there’s this ray gun I nicked. Watch out, it’s loaded!"’

Ian examined the weapon with renewed interest, turning it over in his hands. ‘I never did find that out, did I?’ he said.

‘Well, for goodness sake, don’t try now!’ Barbara alrnost screeched in sudden panic. ‘You could bring the whole place tumbling down around our ears.’

‘Like the walls of Jericho,’ Vicki said.

‘Well, if I have to try it out on a live target, and if it doesn’t work, it’ll be too late, won’t it?’ Ian argued.

‘Can’t be helped. Even if it doesn’t bring the place tumbling down, it could bring those... those people, whatever they are, down on us.’

‘Like the hordes of Ghengis Khan,’ Vicki said.

‘Oh, shut up, Vicki! Shut up!’ Barbara slapped her hands over her ears

and closed her eyes screwing her eyelids up tight.

‘Sorry,’ Vicki said. She pulled down the corners of her mouth and turned an ‘I didn’t mean anything by it’ face on Ian. Ian frowned in sympathetic understanding and put an arm around Barbara.

‘Come on, Barbara...’ He gave her shoulders a little squeeze... ‘Don’t take on now. We’ll be okay.’

Barbara opened her eyes, removed her hands from her ears, lowered her shoulders, took a deep breath and nodded; even attempted a little smile.

‘Good.’ Ian smiled back, jerked his head forward, and they moved off once more.

But the Doctor, unlike Barbara, wasn’t feeling in the least nervous. In fact he was growing extremely bored with their aimless peripatetic wanderings and was engrossed in an exhibit. Vicki joined him in passing, pausing to arch her back and look sideways over her shoulder.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed. ‘That’s nice. A model of a flying saucer. Isn’t it good? Such detail.’

‘That’s because it’s the real thing,’ the Doctor said.

‘What!’ Vicki stared at him disbelievingly.

‘Oh, yes. Yes, it is,’ he insisted. ‘It’s not a model at all.

It’s the real thing, believe me.’

Vicki moved closer and the Doctor hurriedly gestured for her not to go too close to the sensor. She tip-toed to the side of the cabinet.

‘But so small!’ She exclaimed. ‘Who could get into that?’

‘Size is relative, Vicki, like everything else. Just think of a microbe in a mastodon’s stomach.’

‘Mastodon?’

‘All right, elephant then.’

‘Doctor...’

‘Hmm?’ He looked up. Vicki indicated the imminent departure of Ian and Barbara from the corridor and intimated they should follow.

‘All right, child, all right, I’m coming.’ He waved her on and, readjusting the spectacles on his nose, returned to his study of the saucer. Vicki, taking him at his word, turned and ran after the others. The Doctor wondered whether he dare activate the sensor and learn more about the saucer.

He was sorely tempted. He dithered for a moment before deciding discretion was the better choice, and backed away, pocketing his spectacles but still intrigued. A door behind him opened, a hand across his mouth stifled his cry of alarm, and he was bundled unceremoniously into the next room.

Tor cast a quick glance around the corridor to make sure they were unobserved and then joined the others to find the Doctor lying, apparently unconscious, on the floor.

‘What happened?’

‘I don’t know,’ Sita cried. ‘I hardly touched him. He just fell.’

‘Maybe he hit his head on the floor,’ Bo suggested, very worried. Tor turned his attention from the Doctor to the other two and didn’t notice the Time Lord open a crafty eye, trying to size up the situation. But, as his captors were standing behind him, he could not see them without moving and he could not understand what they were saying, so he closed his eye and feigned unconsciousness again.

‘All right,’ Tor said. ‘Sita, you stay here and watch him.’

‘Me! Why. me? Where are you going?’ Sita was thoroughly alarmed.

‘To try and find something to bring him around. Don’t worry, we won’t be long. Come on, Bo.’

‘No, wait!’ Sita called, but it was too late. Nervously he regarded the prostrate figure at his feet and looked anxiously around the silent room.

‘Well, he *was* following us!’ Barbara insisted.

‘I know that,’ Ian said. ‘But when did he stop? Didn’t either of you see or hear anything?’

‘Oh, come on, Ian,’ Barbara objected, ‘you weren’t all that far in front. Don’t try and put all the blame on us.’

‘I’m not trying to put the blame on anybody.’

‘He was looking at a flying saucer,’ Vicki said.

Barbara turned on her. ‘I’ve had just about enough of you, young lady. What with the walls of Jericho and the hordes of Ghengis Khan and now flying saucers.

How could a flying saucer fit in here?’

‘Oh, you know all about flying saucers, do you?’ Vicki was highly indignant. ‘How do you know what sizes they come in? And there was that space shuttle in here, wasn’t there? I even remember its name, *The Robert E. Lee*. That’s not exactly minute. Funny, I don’t recall a space shuttle named *The Robert E. Lee*. Must have been after...’

‘All right, Vicki!’ Ian cut short Vicki’s loquaciousness.

‘He should have missed us and caught up by now. Unless...

Well, he could have taken a wrong turning.’

‘I think he’s been captured,’ Vicki said.

‘Who by?’ Barbara asked. ‘And if you say King Kong I’ll scream.’

‘No. King Kong only went for girls,’ Ian chuckled. ‘He ate them.’

‘This isn’t a laughing matter, Ian,’ Barbara chided.

‘Sorry.’

‘This is a crisis. Which is the way into the glass cases?

Standing here discussing Hollywood movies? Or going back and finding the Doctor? Maybe we should just try and take off in the *The Robert E. Lee*!’ she snorted.

‘We can’t keep worrying about *that* part of our future,’

Ian said.

‘If we don’t, there may not be any other part to worry about,’ was the reply.

‘Well, I say we go on,’ Ian said. ‘If the Doctor is lost he’ll take the specific gravity of something or other, bisect an angle, measure the isosceles triangle, compute a figure or two and be waiting for us at the front door when we get there, wondering what took us so long.’

‘All right,’ Barbara agreed.

‘Good. Let’s try this way.’ And, without waiting for a vote, Ian moved off.

Barbara stood for a moment and watched him go, followed by Vicki. Then she too moved.

4

Capture

Tor and Bo moved swiftly back down the corridor towards the room in which they had left Sita and the Doctor, Bo looking anxiously around and almost tripping over himself in his anxiety. Tor nursed a small phial in his right hand.

At the door they stopped, looked around once more, and then slipped into the room, Bo closing the door behind them. They stood just inside the door staring down at the floor where Sita lay, motionless. There was no sign of the Doctor.

‘Is he dead?’ Bo whispered. He was normally of a pallid complexion but now he was a chalky-white and quite terrified. Tor handed him the phial which he took with trembling fingers; Tor knelt beside the stricken Sita and laid a hand on his chest. After a few moments he shook his head and held his hand out for the phial, broke the seal, and holding Sita’s mouth open, fed him the contents, drop by drop. There was a second and then Sita groaned and opened his eyes, staring straight at Tor. Another second and he sat bolt upright, let out a howl, and clapped a hand to the back of his head.

‘What happened?’ Tor demanded to know.

Sita hung his head and thought. Then he looked up again at Tor. ‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘I turned my back for a second and then... and then... nothing.’

‘Nothing?’

‘I don’t remember anything.’

‘Was it the old man?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Did he go out?’ Tor glanced towards the door and Bo couldn’t help turning around and taking a look too.

‘I keep telling you!’ Sita let out another groan. ‘I didn’t see anything. I didn’t hear anything. Everything just went black.’

Tor got to his feet and held out his hand to give Sita a lift. Sita pulled himself up and stood swaying on legs that suddenly trembled. Tor held on to his arm.

‘Are you all right?’ he asked, concerned. Sita nodded.

Tor turned to Bo: ‘He must have gone to join the others.

Come on, we’ll see if we can find them.’

‘They’re still armed, remember!’ Sita said, massaging the back of his neck. ‘We’ll have to take our chance this time, otherwise the Moroks will get to them first, if they haven’t already done so. Bo...’ Tor jerked his head to indicate the door and Bo opened it, peeped out, then nodded the all clear to the other two who quickly slipped out of the room behind him.

For a long while the room appeared to be deserted.

Then a high-pitched, metallic, electronic-sounding voice broke the silence, the voice of a Dalek: ‘I - fooled - them -

all. I - am - the - master.’ The voice was followed by an unmistakable chuckle and the top of the Dalek casing was lifted to reveal the self-satisfied smile of the Doctor.

‘Fooled them,’ he chuckled, ‘Fooled them. The last place anyone thinks of looking is right under their noses.’

He climbed out of the casing, dusted himself off and walked to the door, opened it, and stared straight into the muzzles of two Morok guns.

‘Right under their noses,’ he said ironically.

‘Ian, it’s no good. I can’t go on. We’re going around in circles.’

Barbara puffed out her cheeks and blew out hard, took off her cardigan and sat on the plinth of an exhibit, but screamed and leapt to her feet again as a voice seemed to explode right behind her.

This is a model of a launch-pad for the battle cruiser type *CB KRIS* from the planet Kylos...'

The voice cut off as they backed hurriedly away from the exhibit.

'They don't believe in wasting power,' Vicki observed.

'If you're not interested it just switches off.' She looked around the gallery in which they found themselves and heard her tummy rumble. 'How long have we been in this place?' she enquired peevishly. 'I'm hungry.'

'To be quite truthful, so am I,' Ian admitted. 'And I've no idea how long it's been. I've lost all track of time.'

'It must be night by now,' Vicki complained.

'If they have a night,' Ian said.

'Night or day, what difference does it make?' Barbara snapped. 'I don't even know if there is still some kind of world out there. I'm hot. I'm tired.' And, moving to the side of the plinth, she sat down again.

'The Minotaur!' Ian exclaimed.

'What!' Barbara leapt to her feet again.

'Where?' Vicki said, looking around in alarm.

'So much for you and your encyclopaedic knowledge,'

Ian teased. 'Don't you know your mythology? When Theseus entered the labyrinth he took with him a ball of thread so he could use it to retrace his footsteps.'

'Ian... We haven't just entered the labyrinth,' Barbara explained patiently, 'We've been in it for hours and hours.'

But this didn't seem to matter to Ian. 'It'll stop us going around in circles, don't you see?' He held out his hand towards Barbara. 'May I?'

'May you what?'

‘Give us the sweater.’

Barbara hesitated, then handed it over. Ian took a handful of wool in each hand and tried to pull the garment apart. Then he put a corner between his teeth and gave it a three-cornered tug. Then he took it out of his mouth and looked at it.

‘How do you take this thing apart?’ he asked.

‘You’re not meant to,’ Barbara replied. ‘Unless you’re thinking of knitting me a new one. Oh, give it here!’ She snatched it back. ‘And you could at least ask. It’s one of my best cardigans.’

‘I did ask. I said, may I?’

‘Give me your penknife.’

‘Here.’ Ian dug his hand into a pocket and, producing the knife, opened it and passed it to her. She ripped the hem and started to unpick the wool, passing the end to Ian.

He tied it around the gantry that was part of the model launch-pad.

‘But if we leave a trail of wool,’ Vicki objected, ‘someone could see it and follow us, and we’ll be caught.’

‘If we can’t find our way out of here - and soon - we’re going to be caught anyway,’ came back the reply.

‘Maybe we’ll find our way to the canteen,’ Vicki ventured. ‘If we starve to death it won’t matter whether we’re found or not.’

The Doctor was bundled into what he presumed to be a cell, cylindrical in shape and, like all the other rooms in the building, devoid of any apparent light sourceor means of ventilation. Not only that but, had he not been outside one second, and in the next, and seen the door close behind him, he would have thought he was there through some conjuring trick and that the room was hermetically sealed. There was simply no way of telling which panel was wall and which was door. It was like being imprisoned in a tin can, except for the fact that, wherever it was coming from, there was light.

The only furnishing in the cell was a fairly ordinary looking chair with arms, set on an estrade and facing away from him. He walked around to look at it from the other side, then turned his attention to the walls, running his fingers across the panels. But, as this got him absolutely

nowhere, he gave up, sat in the chair and decided to let events take their course.

He was too restless to remain seated for long and, after a few moments of drumming his fingertips together, he decided to inspect the walls once more. It was only when he attempted to rise that he realised he was firmly trapped.

Some kind of force field held him securely to the chair. It was at this point that a panel facing the chair slid back to reveal a smiling Lobos seated at his desk.

'Welcome to Xeros,' he said.

'I beg your pardon?' the Doctor replied, not understanding.

'Welcome to Xeros,' Lobos repeated, in English.

'How did you do that?' the Doctor asked with no little surprise.

'Do what?' Lobos looked around, unsure as to what the Doctor was referring to.

'Switch languages so quickly,' the Doctor explained.

'I haven't,' Lobos replied. 'This did.' He fingered a small, glowing, button-like object just below his collar. 'I am still speaking my own language and you are still speaking yours but we can understand each other through instantaneous translation. All it required was for you to say a few words and you hear me in... what is it by the way?'

'English.'

'Ah, English...' He glanced at the video screen beside him and, after a couple of seconds, continued: 'That is an Earth language, yes?'

The Doctor nodded.

'So now we know which system and which planet you come from. And I will hear you in Morok. And now you know which planet I come from.'

'Amazing!' the Doctor said. 'Truly amazing! Instant dubbing.' His admiration for this piece of Morok technology was patently obvious.

'Simple really,' Lobos said with false modesty. 'It translates a hundred thousand modes of audio communication and is kept constantly

updated, language being a living thing and constantly changing.'

'Of course,' the Doctor agreed. 'New slang, new expressions, new technological terms, et cetera.

Knowledge, like the universe, is forever expanding and language has to keep up with it.'

'Unfortunately, it is lacking in quite a few thousand more which have not been fed into it, and I doubt that they ever will be. The Moroks seem to have lost their desire for expansion.' Lobos sat for a moment staring into space and regretting the Empire had no more use for such as he.

Then he pulled himself together, looked curiously at the Doctor, and smiled again. 'So, welcome to Xeros, the smallest planet in the Morok Empire. What is your name?'

There was no answer.

'Very well. Mine is Lobos and I am Governor of this planet.'

'Curator of the Museum would seem a better title.'

Lobos nodded. 'Yes, Xeros is a museum, a lasting memorial to the achievements of the Morok civilisation.'

'Really? From my observations it seems to be arousing very little interest.'

Lobos shrugged. 'People tire of their heritage. Once sightseers filled this place, marvelling at what they saw.

Now? Well, the occasional ship from Morok calls...' He shrugged again.

'Perhaps if you reduced the price of admission,' the Doctor smiled.

'So, you have a sense of humour. You don't by any chance play chess do you?'

'I've been known to,' the Doctor said.

'Well?'

'Try me.'

‘I might very well do that… if we have time. Though, be warned, I learned my chess from a master.’

‘So did I,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Several in fact.’

Lobos decided to change the subject. ‘Tell me about your ship.’

The Doctor gazed around the room.

‘Perhaps its inclusion in our museum might bring the visitors flocking back,’ Lobos suggested. ‘It must be something of a rarity. If we were fortunate enough to be able to include the crew, that would be novel.’

‘Grotesque, I’d call it.’ The Doctor said. ‘When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Quoting - from another master,’ the Time Lord said.

Lobos got up from behind his desk and paced the floor, hands clasped behind his back. ‘No,’ he said. ‘I’m afraid admission charges have nothing to do with the lack of interest. Our civilisation rests on its laurels’ - now where had he picked up that expression? ‘Galactic conquest is a thing of the past. Life now, it is said, is purely to enjoy.’

‘The decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Yes, it has happened before in galaxies far beyond your reach.’

Lobos looked suddenly interested. ‘Tell me about it.’

‘What?’

‘This Empire.’ He waved his hand in a circular motion, trying to recall the name.

‘Rome?’ the Doctor prompted.

‘Rome.’

‘What’s to tell?’ the Doctor asked. ‘History repeats itself, that’s all.’

Lobos reseated himself and leaned forward on the desk.

‘No, I want to know,’ he insisted. ‘What happened to it?

This Empire.’

‘It grew, it conquered, it fed on - and off - those it conquered. It got too big for its boots.’

Lobos laughed. ‘Too big for its boots! I like that. Too big for its boots!’ And he chuckled merrily. The Doctor raised an eyebrow.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘Rather like your - what did you call it? -

Morok? Rather like your ‘’Torok Empire I would think.

Then it declined and fell.’

Lobos stopped laughing. ‘How?’ he asked.

‘Well, now,’ the Doctor placed his fingertips together.

‘That, as they say, is the sixty-four thousand dollar question, isn’t it? And there were probably as many reasons as there were dollars. Am I going to sit here in this chair for the next twenty-four hours giving you a potted history of the Roman Empire?’

‘If I feel like it,’ Lobos said.

This time the Doctor raised both eyebrows. ‘Well, let’s see if we can’t put it in a nutshell, keep it to the kernel as it were. There was a revolt by slaves led by one Spartacus.’

‘What!’ Lobos stiffened.

‘But that was crushed.’

Lobos relaxed.

‘There was trouble in the colonies.’

‘There always is,’ Lobos said.

‘Political backstabbing.’

‘Ah, yes,’ Lobos said, thinking of his own exile. ‘There’s always that too.’

‘Dissention, schism, uprising, rebellion. Finally Rome herself was invaded. There are some who attribute the whole thing to lead poisoning sending them all mad. The Romans were great engineers. They built a water system with marvellous aqueducts of which, I am sure, they were inordinately proud. But, unfortunately, the channels were lined with lead. I suppose it could have been something as simply as that, but it seems to be the way of all empires: sooner or later the conquerer is conquered.’

Lobos sat for a while, thinking, then: ‘So why did you come here?’ he eventually asked.

‘Exploration,’ was the simple reply.

‘Ah, a scientist! Good. It makes a change to have someone intelligent to talk to. And you have come from this... Earth?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘You don’t want to answer? Very well, let’s try another question. Where are your companions?’

The Doctor chuckled to himself. Lobos watched him for a second or two then leaned forward and touched a switch on the console in front of him.

‘You will tell me,’ he said. ‘I can get all the information I want without the need of resorting to brute force. Your co-operation is not essential. Now, where are your companions?’ Lobos’s shoulders suddenly jerked forward and he let out a little gasp as he grimaced in pain. He placed a hand over his stomach.

‘Indigestion?’ the Doctor enquired kindly. ‘I remember I had it once, heartburn you know, like a knife between the shoulder blades. I think it was a mixture of goat cheese and olives that did it. Galen recommended the rind of a lemon as being of great benefit to a delicate constitution.’

‘Galen? What is Galen?’

‘An Ancient Greek physician. Oh, yes, the lemon...’

‘I do not know this Ancient Greek or his lemon!’ Lobos sounded quite put out. He was growing increasingly annoyed with this scientist who seemed to be playing games with him and was having second thoughts about the chess. To be beaten by a Morok robot was one thing. To be beaten by this scruffy-looking Earth creature was quite another. He hastily slipped a capsule into his mouth. And what was this heartburn to which he referred? It sounded extremely nasty, particularly for a Morok with two hearts.

‘What’s this?’ Bo asked, kneeling down and tracing with his fingers a length of woollen thread.

‘They’re leaving a trail,’ Tor said.

‘Why?’

Tor looked at Bo and wished the youngster wouldn't believe he had all the answers. 'They must have missed the old one,' he said. 'Yes, this was put there for him to follow them.'

'No, I don't think so,' Sita'disagreed. 'They would have come back to look for him, surely.'

But Tor was in no mood to be contradicted. 'Well, whatever the reason,' he snapped, 'it's a trail and trails are meant to be followed. So let's follow it.'

'I ask you again,' Lobos said. 'Where are your companions?'

Again the Doctor refused to answer. Lobos turned away and looked at the screen. Then he flicked an intercom switch and, smiling at the Doctor - the capsule had obviously gone to work on the pain - said, 'Commander B

Division.'

A disembodied voice immediately answered him: 'B

Division commander, sir.'

'Proceed immediately to Corridor 417. Detain three Earth creatures: one male, one female, one young female.'

'Message received. It will be dealt with immediately.'

'You look surprised,' Lobos said. 'I told you there was no need for brute force. Unless, of course, I feel like it,' he added threateningly. 'Look.' He swivelled the screen into a position where the Doctor could see it. On the screen was an image of Ian and the girls in the corridor that contained the flying saucer. 'A simple matter of thought selection,'

Lobos went on. 'By asking a question I plant an image in your mind. No matter what you might say, so long as you are in that chair, I will see your mental pictures reflected here.' He tapped the screen. 'So, you see, it is quite useless for you to lie. Shall we return to the questioning? How did you get here?'

The image of a penny-farthing cycle appeared on the screen. Lobos frowned. The Doctor smiled at the governor's reaction. He was beginning to enjoy the situation.

Ian played out the last few inches of wool. ‘Well... that’s it.

‘It didn’t work, did it?’ Barbara said.

‘At least we didn’t go around in circles or backtrack.’

‘Why don’t they put up signs like they do in ordinary museums?’ Vicki sighed.

‘Maybe the Doctor is wrong,’ Barbara said. ‘Maybe you can’t change the future.’

‘Don’t say that, Barbara!’ Vicki cried. ‘I don’t even want to think of such an awful thing happening.’

Ian dropped the wool and moved away, disappearing around a corner. Barbara shook her head and took Vicki’s hands. ‘I don’t want it to happen either, of course I don’t!

But we can’t just walk about for ever hoping we won’t be discovered. We’ve got to do something positive. And where is the Doctor?’ She looked around as though almost expecting him to appear, breezily unconcerned. Instead it was Ian who returned, smiling broadly.

‘So it didn’t work, hey?’ He crooked his index finger, indicating they should follow him, ‘Come and see what I’ve found.’

Vicki and Barbara followed him around the corner and there, ahead of them, lay the outside doors.

‘What is it like, this planet, Earth?’ Lobos asked.

A series of images appeared on the screen: a colony of seals congregated on a rocky outcrop, diving into the choppy sea, cavorting about; penguins, strutting about, flapping their wings, nature’s natural clowns; the wild black and white wastes of Antarctica with eddies of snow being blown across the ice; a close-up of a walrus, all tusks and bristling moustachios; and finally back to the seals.

‘What are these creatures?’ Lobos asked.

‘Friends of mine,’ the Doctor assured him, still smiling.

‘But these are aquatic creatures! You are not an aquatic creature.’

‘Oh, am I not?’ The images were replaced by a picture of the Doctor posing magnificently in Edwardian striped bathing costume and

boater. The Doctor chuckled. Not a bad pair of legs, he thought.

'So...' Lobos growled. 'You still see fit to play games with me. Well then, I don't have any more use for you and we have a saying on Morok, he who laughs last laughs longest...'

'Funny,' the Doctor said, 'they have that saying on Earth too.'

'Very funny, particularly as it is I who have the last laugh.' He pressed a button on his desk, the doors behind him slid open and two soldiers entered, saluting smartly.

'Take him to the preparation room,' Lobos commanded.

'Great!' Ian exclaimed. 'We've found the way out, now *how* do we get out?' They stared helplessly at the huge doors unable to discern any means of opening them.

'Open sesame!' Ian said with irritable frustration. 'This is becoming more and more nightmarish. We don't know which way to turn. Every way seems the wrong way. We don't know what's out there anyway.'

'Choice is only possible when you have at least some facts to go on,' Barbara said. 'We don't seem to have any.'

'Yes,' Ian agreed, still searching around the door for some indication of its mechanism. 'They say to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Well, we've been forewarned and all it's done is to leave us totally and utterly confused.'

'Totally is enough,' Barbara said. 'Utterly is irrelevant.

And someone is coming. I suggest we make ourselves immediately, totally, and utterly invisible.' She was already moving to one side and the three of them dived for cover behind a conveniently placed and suitably large enough exhibit.

They were just in time. There was the steady tramp of marching feet and Lobos appeared at the head of a squad of soldiers. The doors opened in front of them, they marched out, and the doors started to close again. Ian waited until almost the last second then darted out and, before the doors finally came together, jammed his penknife between them, creating a chink just wide enough to see through.

Barbara and Vicki left their hiding place to join him.

‘What’s happening?’ Vicki asked. And, before Ian could reply, had slipped in front of him and, crouching, applied her own eye lower down the crack. ‘Oh, no!’ she groaned.

‘They’ve got the TARDIS! Oh, Ian, we’ll never get away now!’

Lobos stood staring at the TARDIS as though he were challenging this strange, silent, unknown object to give up its secrets. He walked up to it, touched it, walked around it, viewing it from every angle. He had already had its exterior dimensions graphically illustrated for him on the scanner but it was another thing to actually stand there and look at it. ‘Huh!’ He finally grunted. ‘That is the strangest looking craft I have ever seen. I could fly to Morok flapping my arms quicker than that could get off the ground.’

The soldiers dutifully laughed. Lobos viewed the TARDIS from another angle. ‘It must be very cramped and uncomfortable for four travellers inside at one time,’ he observed. ‘Oh, by the way,’ he turned to the officer beside him, ‘these travellers come from a planet called Earth.’

The soldiers, imagining this to be another example of their leader’s wit, burst out laughing again but Lobos stilled them with a look. Then he turned back and regarded the officer, a giant creature who towered over hirn. Lobos noted he had only one eye and a deep scar that ran from his forehead to his chin. ‘The language they speak,’ he went on, ‘is one called English. How it got into the memory banks I have no idea considering that is an area we have never explored. But, I suppose, anomolies arise in every system.’

‘I seem to remember,’ the officer said, ‘at one time there was some talk of an invasion and a number of Earth languages were processed, but nothing came of it. Maybe they were left in by mistake. You know what civil servants are, clutter clutter clutter.’ And the officer sniggered.

Lobos turned his attention back to the TARDIS and the officer anticipated his next question. ‘We were unable to gain entry, sir.’

‘Oh, dear!’ Lobos said with undisguised sarcasm.

‘Didn’t they leave you the key then? Force it, you fool!’

The officer swung around and bellowed at the nearest soldier. ‘ *You*!’ The man leapt to attention and saluted.

‘What happened to that equipment I called for?’

The man started to stutter his protest that he had never heard any order for any equipment but the officer yelled even louder to shut him up. ‘I’m not interested in excuses!’

he bawled. ‘I’ll deal with you later. Get it!’

‘Yes, sir.’ The soldier saluted again, did a smart about-face and, not too sure of what he was going to look for, or where, marched off. The officer turned to Lobos.

‘Incompetent idiots,’ he snorted disdainfully.

Lobos was not impressed. ‘You’re not a Morok,’ he said,

‘Where are you from?’

‘My name is Mort, sir. I am a mercenary from Kreme.’

‘Humph!’ Lobos turned his back. He might have known. He had no time for soldiers of fortune. Give him a professional every time.

‘What are they doing?’ Barbara whispered, the only one of the three unable to see.

‘They just seem to be standing around,’ Vicki replied.

‘Looking at the TARDIS.’

‘Let’s hope they don’t do any damage,’ Barbara wished fervently.

‘There’s not much they can do,’ Ian assured her. ‘Unless they get inside.’

‘Do you suppose they’re going to bring it in here?’ Vicki asked.

‘I would think so, eventually.’ Ian glanced at Barbara. ‘Well, what next? Find the Doctor, I suppose.’

‘Maybe one of us should stay here and keep an eye on the TARDIS,’ Vicki suggested. ‘If we have to leave in a hurry we don’t want to waste time having to look for it.’

‘We know where it’s going. We saw it before, remember?’ Ian re-applied his eye to the crack.

‘And could you find your way back there?’ Vicki said.

Ian glanced down at the top of her head. ‘In which case we’d all have to stay here and watch it.’ And he went back to his spying.

‘Stay as you are! Don’t move!’ The voice echoed down the gallery. They stiffened. Ian was the first to turn around to see a Morok guard standing a few feet away, his gun levelled at them. Vicki got up from her crouched position and slowly she and Barbara turned to face the soldier. For a long moment no-one moved, then Ian took a step forward, but Barbara laid a restraining hand on his arm, never taking her eyes off the Morok.

‘Don’t, Ian. He’ll fire that thing.’

Ian turned his head slightly towards her though he too kept a beady eye on their captor.

‘Well, wouldn’t that change the shape of things to come?’ he whispered.

‘It certainly would,’ she replied. ‘There’d be only three of us in those cases instead of four.’

The guard frowned, waved his gun about, and ordered them to move away from the door slowly. Barbara and Vicki started to comply but now it was Ian who stretched out a restraining arm. ‘No, wait a minute,’ he whispered.

Then, turning his back on the guard, went on: ‘From what we heard outside, these guys seem to work pretty much by the book. I doubt the word "initiative" figures prominently in their vocabulary. Why don’t we call his bluff?’

‘Because he’s not bluffing, that’s why!’ Barbara hissed.

‘Are you out of your mind?’

‘That’s enough talking!’ The guard barked. ‘I said, move out.’

Ian turned back to him, smiling. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘we heard you the first time. But what if we don’t feel like it?’

The guard’s frown deepened. This was hardly the reaction he had expected. Ian noted his irresolution with some satisfaction and started to move quite casually towards him.

‘Don’t go too far, Ian!’ Barbara warned, seeing in her mind’s eye the

vision of what that ray gun could do. But Ian still continued his advance.

‘Yes,’ the guard said, ‘She’s right. Now move back.

Move back!’ But it was he, showing increasing signs of nervousness, who took a step backwards.

‘There was nothing in your orders about killing us, was there?’ Ian said softly. The guard retreated. ‘Well, was there? Why don’t you answer me? Was there?’ His eyes never left the Morok’s face.

‘No, no, there wasn’t.’ He ran his tongue across his upper lip. ‘But that doesn’t mean to say I won’t if I have to.’

‘But you don’t have to. What do you think your superiors would say if you killed us?’ Ian’s voice was now so low it was almost as though he were trying to soothe a bewildered child. ‘ "Have you brought in the prisoners?"

they’d ask. And you’d have to say, "No, I went and shot them all."’ Ian tut-tutted and shook his head, half-turned away as if to say something to the others, then swiftly swung back and, knocking the guard’s arm to one side, grappled with him, yelling to Barbara and Vicki: ‘Run! Get out of it! Both of you!’

But the two stood stockstill, taken as much by surprise as the guard and seemingly rooted to the spot. Ian was now struggling desperately, holding the man’s wrist so that the muzzle of the gun pointed anywhere but at a living target.

The panic-stricken guard fought back fiercely. He now had an excuse to kill. He could always claim he was attacked when the aliens resisted arrest.

‘Will you... get... out of here?’ Ian yelled to Barbara and Vicki, between gasps, as the Morok swung him around, almost knocking him off balance. But Ian kept his grip on the man’s wrist, trying to regain the initiative by forcing him back over a cabinet and holding him there. Had he not been armed he could have tried for a knock-out punch but, as it was, wrestling seemed the better bet. But the Morok was stronger than he looked and already Ian could feel himself weakening, painfully dragging air into his lungs, his legs beginning to feel like rubber and the muscles in his arms aching with fatigue.

Still Vicki and Barbara did not move.

It was only when the doors behind him slid open to reveal Lobos and his guards that they were suddenly galvanised into action and took to their heels, disappearing in opposite directions like rabbits down their respective boltholes.

'Get them!' Lobos yelled and the guards streamed into the building. Ian broke free from his opponent. But too late. He was immediately jumped by a couple more. A quick, hard, jab to the stomach knocked the remaining breath from his body and two pairs of hands took a firm grip of his arms. In a way he was rather glad to have someone else take the weight off his feet. Lobos glared at him.

'Take him to my quarters,' he snapped, and watched as the guards dragged Ian out of the building, passed Mort who was standing there watching too. 'Well, mercenary?'

Lobos said, 'Do you think you're up to flushing out a couple of women? Or are you just going to stand there looking pretty?'

By the time they had got out of the building and moved a short distance away Ian was beginning to recover and thinking of escape. Struggling, he decided, would appear to be a useless exercise so, that being the case, why not try the opposite? He let out a deep sigh and went limp in his captor's hands. The two soldiers checked their stride to adjust to this sudden increase in weight and, taking advantage of the momentary distraction, Ian rammed his elbow into the first soldier's stomach. The winded Morok gasped and reeled away and Ian swung a perfect uppercut that connected with the second guard's chin. As the man catapulted backwards Ian let out a howl of pain and clutched his bruised knuckles. Surely he had broken every bone in his hand. The pain almost paralysed his arm.

Still moaning, he crouched over his injury and turned just in time to see the butt of a ray gun descending.

Evading the intended blow, he straightened up, and there was a mutual howl as the top of his head connected with a Morok nose. As the dark red, almost black blood spurted over the white uniform, Ian turned and ran for his life.

Barbara stopped running and flopped against a wall, holding her ribs and gasping for breath. She looked back along the empty corridor through which she had just run.

Which way now? From one corridor to another? From one room to another? While, all the time, they were closing in and ultimately she

was trapped? It was hopeless.

Then she noticed an insignificant looking door in the wall opposite. With another glance down the corridor she moved across to it. On the wall was a touch control. She placed her finger on it and the door slid open. Beyond it she could discern what looked like a small storage room in which were stacked various containers. The layer of dust on the one nearest the door gave some indication of the infrequency of the room's use. Maybe it was the museum's equivalent of a broom closet.

The door was beginning to close and Barbara touched the control once more and slipped inside. A couple of seconds elapsed and the door closed silently behind her.

She was in pitch blackness. She heard the approach of heavy footsteps and felt her way by memory and touch to one of the largest containers, groped her way around it, and crouched down. It was just as well, she thought, that her pursuers had such a slow turn of speed. She remembered the stiffness of their movements and pictured them now, moving up the corridor towards her hiding place.

The door opened and a shaft of light cut through the darkness and spread like a white runner on the floor embossed with the elongated shadow of one of the guards.

It seemed to stay there for an eternity. Then it moved further into the room, the upper part of the body sliding like a shadow puppet half way up the far wall. The head moved, first to one side, then the other. Then it backed out, the door closed, the light was gone.

It was only then that Barbara realised she had been holding her breath and released the air from her lungs. She waited a while before leaving her hiding place and creeping slowly back to the door. She listened carefully, making sure all was clear, then started to feel around the door, slowly at first and then with movements growing more and more panicky. The horror of her situation sank in. There was no means of opening the door from the inside. She was locked in: locked in a room of total silence and impenetrable darkness.

She sank to the floor and leaned back against the door. I could die in here, she thought. In a thousand years' time someone will open the door and find my mummified body covered in cobwebs and dust. I wonder if they have spiders on this planet? She shuddered at the thought and drew her knees up to her chin, hugging her legs. No, she

thought, they won't discover a mummy at all. After all, I've got to get out of here, to get into a glass case. Perverse though it was, there was some comfort in that thought.

Vicki sat back and let out a long sigh of satisfaction. She inspected the tupperware-type utensil in front of her, still containing a few drops of a dirty dark-green substance -

and burped. 'Oh, pardon me!' She giggled and looked around at a dozen faces regarding her solemnly. She smiled an embarrassed smile.

'Have you had enough?' Tor asked.

'Yes, thank you,' Vicki nodded. 'It was delicious, despite its... even though it didn't really look very appetising. But it was very nice. Thank you. A bit like sweet and sour sauce really, with a sort of nutmeggy aftertaste.' She realised they had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. 'What was it?' she asked.

'It's called phosyn and it's manufactured in the laboratory. I don't know how.' Tor seated himself opposite her.

'I could manage a little more,' Vicki said hopefully.

Tor shook his head. 'I'm sorry, but that's all we have. You've just eaten a Xeron's rations for three days.'

'Or, if you want to look at it another way,' Bo said,

'a day's rations for three Xerons.'

'Oh, I'm sorry!' Vicki apologised, feeling very badly about it. 'Whose rations did I eat?'

'It doesn't matter,' Tor shrugged. 'They were happy to volunteer it.'

Bo gave Tor a sideways glance. He didn't look too happy.

'What else do you get?' Vicki asked brightly.

'What else?' Tor looked distinctly puzzled.

'Yes, to eat.'

'That's it,' Tor said, pointing to the tupperware.

'That's all!'

‘What else do we need?’

‘What a boring diet.’

‘It contains the right amount of everything we need,’

Sita joined the conversation. ‘Nutrients, minerals, vitamins, trace elements, everything.’

‘And I wonder what more besides,’ Vicki said suspiciously.

‘How do you mean?’ Tor asked. Vicki shrugged.

‘Something to keep us quiet, you mean,’ Dako said. It was the first time he had spoken but Vicki had noticed him before any of the others. He was, in human terms, extremely handsome with a lean face and pale grey eyes that seemed to look right through her. She felt herself blushing and turned quickly back to Tor.

‘I suppose, now you feel better, we had better introduce ourselves,’ he suggested, but before he could go on, another voice cut in.

‘I am Dako,’ it said.

Vicki knew who the voice belonged to and that she would have to return her attention to him, even though it would intensify her blush, but not to do so would be rude.

‘How... H-how d-d-do you do? she stammered. Dako frowned, being unable to fathom the meaning behind this seemingly fathomless remark.

‘Dako is the leader of the out-workers,’ Tor continued, his voice carrying an indirect reproof. ‘He shouldn’t be in here. It is forbidden. If he is found...’

‘Found?’ Vicki asked. ‘By who?’

‘The Moroks.’

‘Oh! You mean, the others? The ones in the white uniforms?’

‘That’s right.’ Tor nodded.

‘I won’t be found,’ Dako protested with a hint of the gasconade about him. ‘They never come down here.’

‘Why not?’ Vicki asked.

‘They wouldn’t dare,’ Dako replied. ‘Too much chance of being ambushed.’ And he opened his jacket to reveal the butt of a ray gun protruding from his waistband. He closed the jacket again quickly.

‘Where are we exactly?’ Vicki asked, turning back to Tor.

‘In the vaults of the main building, the old part that is never used.’

‘That’s why the Moroks won’t come down here,’ Dako interrupted again. ‘They don’t know this area. We know every room, every passage, ways to get in and was to get out. We know every inch of it.’

Vicki nodded then looked quickly towards the door as one of the Xerons standing guard opened it to admit another of their number. Tor stood up. ‘Gyar! What news?’

‘The man has been captured. There is no sign of the woman.’ Gyar was tall, at least six feet two, with a lean frame, fair hair and green eyes, and a gentle manner. He looked down at Vicki. ‘I’m sorry,’ he said.

‘Don’t worry, Vicki,’ Dako said, heading for the door.

‘I’ll find her.’

‘No!’ Tor shouted. ‘You’re not even supposed to be in here. Let someone else go.’

‘I will find her,’ Dako said, and slipped out of the room.

‘ *He what!* ’ Lobos roared, glaring at the soldier who stood stiffly before him, his glassy eyes unfocused and his mind racing, trying to dredge up some kind of excuse however feeble. But not even the feeblest excuse would come to mind. Both his hearts were heating so fast it was almost as if they were racing each other. Any moment now and he was going to hyper-ventilate.

Lobos turned to look at Ogrek who was regarding the soldier with no particular interest, rather like someone in a supermarket idly wondering whether to purchase a name brand or the generic variety of a packet of frozen peas. At the sight of Ogrek’s bland expression, Lobos’s rage increased and he exploded like a string of firecrackers.

‘Am I surrounded by incompetent idiots?’ he screamed and felt a stab of pain that had him reaching for his capsules with one hand while,

with the other, he pressed the button on his desk. The door opened. The guards entered. 'This man is under arrest,' Lobos bawled. The guards disarmed the hapless soldier and marched him out.

Lobos slipped the capsule into his mouth and slumped in his chair. Ogrek found something interesting to look at on the ceiling.

Ian flattened himself against the back of the police box and wondered what to do next. After a moment he moved to one side and peeped cautiously around the corner. A guard was standing in front of the TARDIS, his back to Ian, his ray gun loosened in its holster.

Ian tried to judge the distance between them. He could run and make a flying tackle - would probably be able to bring the guard down before he could draw his gun. But then there would be a struggle. The lack of oxygen in the atmosphere was beginning to affect him again and he knew he had to act quickly and without much effort. Soon he would he so weak it would take only the proverbial feather to knock him down.

Distraction, he thought. He had to bring the guard closer to the time-machine and jump him as effortlessly as possible. He looked down at his feet and then, squatting, sifted through the sand, eventually coming up with a handful of small stones. It wasn't for nothing he had been a Western fan as a child. He straightened up, backed away from the TARDIS to give himself elbow room, and lobbed a stone over the top of the box, followed by another, and another in quick succession. Then he slipped, in the opposite direction, around to the front.

The ruse had worked. The guard had moved close to the TARDIS and was looking in the direction from which he had heard the rattle of stones. Fortunately for Ian he was curious but not unduly alarmed and hadn't even bothered to draw his gun. When he eventually turned around again it was to find it pointing at his face and his hand reaching for an empty holster. His jaw dropped and his eyes opened wide. Ian could have no idea what thoughts were racing through the man's head but he was obviously terrified. Ian, however, was taking no chances.

'Don't do anything stupid,' he warned.

'Don't kill me! Please don't kill me!' The man whined.

Obviously, Ian thought, a tour of duty on this planet was looked on as something of a doddle, totally devoid of danger. Anything out of the ordinary and these men were all at sixes and sevens.

‘Well, that rather depends on you,’ he replied, ‘I have some questions I need answering.’

‘If I can, I will,’ the guard squealed. ‘I promise!’

Good grief! Ian thought, his dialogue’s worse than mine.

I’m in a western and he’s in a soap opera! He frowned at these ridiculous random thoughts: the lack of oxygen must be affecting his brain. He’d better get it over with, and fast.

The guard mistook the nature of the frown and grew even more panicky.

‘One of my friends - the old man - has been captured.

What’s happened to him?’ Ian continued.

The guard stared at him or, rather, at the muzzle of the gun. Ian grabbed him by the collar and jammed the gun under his chin. Suddenly the man was talking gibberish, or so Ian thought. He kept pointing to his collar and now, under Ian’s pressure, he was jammed up against the TARDIS. Ian wondered if he had gone off his head or whether he was choking him. He let go of the collar and the man immediately reverted to English. Or so Ian thought.

‘I don’t know! I don’t know!’

‘Is he dead?’

‘No... no...’

That hesitation was enough to indicate that he did know. Ian jammed the gun harder into the man’s throat.

‘Then where is he?’

‘The preparation room,’ he gurgled. ‘He’s been taken to the preparation room. It’s nothing to do with me. I’m just a simple soldier doing my duty. I obey...’

‘What happens there?’ Ian grabbed the collar again.

‘Ti ygrok ga dis brajic,’ the man’said.

‘I said, what happens?’ Ian let go of the collar.

‘And I just told you, he’ll be got ready for the museum.’

‘Take me there.’

The guard’s eyes looked as though they were about to pop out of his head. His mouth was as dry as the sand at his feet and he could hardly speak. ‘You’ll be killed,’ he whispered. ‘We’ll both be killed!’

‘Take me there.’ Ian jabbed the muzzle in even harder.

The guard gulped and nodded: ‘I’ll take you... I’ll take you.’

‘We’ll smoke them out,’ Lobos said finally.

Ogrek regarded his superior, still slumped in his chair, and wondered, if the governor cracked, would he be required to take over? By the great Ork he hoped not.

‘Smoked out,’ he said, as though he knew what Lobos was talking about.

‘I want everybody out of the buildings,’ Lobos said.

‘Now.’

‘They might not be in the buildings.’

‘Who?’

‘The fugitives.’

‘Don’t argue! Just order every Morok and every Xeron out of the buildings!’ He wondered how many capsules he could take before he O.D.’d.

‘And then?’ Ogrek’s voice grated on Lobos’s nerves. Did the man never use any other tone?

‘Then we’ll use Zaphra Gas. If they don’t come out we will go in and find them, paralyzed and no longer able to avoid capture.’

Ogrek stuck his tongue in his cheek and nodded. ‘Their power of locomotion is truly amazing,’ he said. ‘I’ve not seen bipeds capable of that turn of speed. They must be extremely primitive.’

Lobos rose and moved around to the front of the desk to face Ogrek, almost nose to nose. ‘Those primitives have made fools of us. And, if

the gas doesn't do the trick, I don't care what we do with them. Shoot them on sight.'

'Those are your orders?'

Lobos nodded.

'Good.' Ogrek strolled towards the door, 'It will get it all over with that much quicker.' He turned back. 'And I do like clean endings.' He smiled and was gone.

Lobos stared at the door for a moment and then turned and reached for his capsules, changed his mind and hammered with his fists on the desk. The door opened and Matt wheeled himself in.

'Would - you - care - for - a - game - of - chess?' he enquired with metallic politeness. Lobos swung around, lifted his ray gun, and disintegrated Matt.

5

Rescue

Barbara dozed fitfully, slumped behind the door. But suddenly she woke with a start and sat bolt upright. There was someone outside. She listened. There wasn't a sound but she just knew someone was standing outside the door.

On hands and knees she crawled back towards the storage container behind which she had hidden earlier and let out a little gasp as her fingers made painful contact. She crawled around the corner just as the door opened and a shadow stretched across the floor.

It moved further into the room, slowly looking around.

A pair of legs came into view, moved passed her. It was then she noticed the metal bar on the edge of the strip of light. And that strip was growing narrower - the door was closing. Barbara wondered if she should try to make a dash for it before it shut or whether she should reach out for the bar and defend herself with that. In that moment of indecision the door closed. Cautiously she started to feel across the floor for the metal bar. Her hand closed around it. She got to her feet and lifted the weapon above her head, ready for anything except the whisper that broke through the darkness.

'Barbara? Barbara, are you in here?'

A small panel in the ceiling slid open and the room was flooded with light. Dako, his hand still on the control, turned away from the wall and smiled at her. She held the bar where it was and looked at him over her elbow.

'Who are you? How do you know my name?' she asked.

'I am Dako the Xeron.' Once again there was that hint of self-confidence in his voice. 'I am your friend.'

'Yes?'

'Yes. Come' He stalked towards the door, ignoring the iron bar which, at any moment, could have descended on his head. Barbara watched him go and stopped him just inside the door. 'How do I know I can trust you?' she asked.

'We have Vicki. She will tell you.'

Barbara thought quickly. If he knew their names, and only Vicki could have told him, then it couldn't be a trap.

And she had the distinct feeling she already knew Dako the Xeron. Then she remembered - the massacre beneath *The Robert E. Lee*. This was the youth who came to warn the others, the one who was taken away. How could she have forgotten those pale grey eyes that now regarded her steadily?

'What has happened to Ian?'

'Ian?' asked Dako quizzically. 'Oh, you mean the other one. The Moroks have him.'

Barbara lowered the bar and nodded slowly. 'The ones in the white uniforms,' she said.

'Yes,' he replied. 'They are our masters. It was they who turned our planet into a museum, a record of their wars.

But soon we will rise against them and make Xeros our own again, a place of peace. Scientific knowledge and the wisdom of our Elders made us free from want. Then the Moroks invaded us. There was no warning.'

'Didn't you fight back?'

Dako looked down at the metal bar in her hand and raised an

eyebrow. Then he looked back at Barbara. ‘With what?’ This time there was a bitterness in his voice. ‘I have just told you, Xeros was a planet of peace. If you don’t fight wars you don’t keep weapons. If you don’t keep weapons, you submit to brute force.’

Meanwhile, Vicki was continuing her conversation with the Xerons. ‘Then what happened?’ she asked. ‘After the Moroks conquered the planet?’

‘They destroyed everything,’ Tor said. ‘That is, everything they had no need for. They murdered the Elders, most of the others were taken away as slaves, others were banished to a small colony some distance from here.’

‘Of course, this happened a long long time ago,’ Sita butted in.

‘Generations ago,’ Bo added.

‘Every so often,’ Tor continued, ‘the Moroks go into the colony and select youngsters to work here in the museum.

But, when we come of age, we are shipped out in the labour ships and others take our place. We...’ He looked around the room... ‘Are soon to go. That is why we plan...’

‘We’ve sworn to drive the Moroks from Xeros.’ It was Gyar, adding his voice to the story. ‘But it won’t be easy.’

‘No,’ Sita said, ‘the life they impose on us makes organisation difficult.’

‘There don’t seem to be that many of them,’ Vicki observed. ‘You must easily outnumber them.’

‘True,’ Tor agreed. ‘But a very small number of well-armed troops can easily keep control here.’

‘And yet you’re planning a revolution...’

‘How do you know that?’ Sita asked sharply, suddenly suspicious.

‘It’s pretty obvious, isn’t it? Look at you - meeting in secret; Dako with his gun, rescuing me, putting your lives at risk. And, anyway, I...’ They waited for her to continue but Vicki decided to maintain silence. How could she tell them she had seen their deaths? That, in all probability, their revolution was doomed to failure.

‘Why did you come to Xeros?’ Sita asked, still suspicious they might have a spy in their midst.

‘Oh, it was an accident.’

"Tor laughed. ‘Of course,’ he said. ‘No-one would conic here from choice. The Moroks are not known for their hospitality.’

There was silence for a while, one of those pauses in conversation when people stop to gather their thoughts, or just let their thoughts wander.

Finally Vicki broke the silence. ‘But supposing... well. if you did beat them, if you did drive the Moroks out,’ she said, ‘wouldn’t they come back again?’

‘No.’ Tor shook his head. ‘Their Empire has existed for a long time. There must be those on other planets who feel the same as we do. Perhaps there would be more uprisings, enough to keep them busy. The Moroks think they know everything, but we know things too. We have ways of finding out and we’ve heard rumours. But even if they did come back, this time... this time we’d be ready for them.

They wouldn’t find it so easy a second time. They could try and extract revenge by blasting our planet out of existence but we are ready even for that.’

‘Oh?’ Vicki asked, intrigued. ‘How?’

But, before Tor could answer, Sita made for the door.

He did not like this. They were giving away too many secrets and his agitation was obvious. ‘It’s getting late,’ he said. ‘I hope Dako and your friend haven’t been caught.’

His words had the desired effect on Vicki who suddenly looked very worried. Tor tried to reassure her.

‘No,’ he said, ‘they need time to dodge the guards.’

‘All this time?’ Sita argued. ‘We could be fooling ourselves to believe...’

‘Then let’s go and look for them.’ Vicki jumped to her feet.

‘There’s no point!’ Tor snapped. And then, on a quieter note: ‘Sit down, Vicki. Just sit down. We’ll give them a little more time.’

‘Don’t worry, Vicki.’ Gyar smiled. ‘Dako knows what he’s doing.’

Vicki sat down; there was something very calming in Gyar’s gentle manner. She turned back to Tor. ‘You were going to tell me about your... how you would stop the Moroks blowing up your planet.’

Sita looked at Tor and shook his head but Tor either didn’t notice or chose to ignore him. ‘In the museum there’s an exhibit from the planet Spheron. It’s a deflector shield of enormous power, enough to protect the entire planet, and it’s almost in working condition. By the time the Moroks launched a counter-attack we could have it repaired. We’ve already been working on it. The necessary parts are hidden where the Moroks will never find them and only need to be put into place.’

‘Good!’ Vicki got to her feet again and looked around.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘sitting here and planning and dreaming of a revolution isn’t going to win your planet hack. I suggest we go and do something about it.’

Sita laughed for the first time: ‘Like what? We do all we can.’

Vicki turned and looked at him, placing her hands on her hips and cocking her head to one side. ‘By making a nuisance of yourselves?’

‘What can we do without weapons?’ Tor protested.

‘Nothing, I suppose.’ Vicki turned hack to him. ‘We must get some.’

Sita laughed again. ‘Now who’s dreaming?’

Vicki regarded him for a long time and finally came to the conclusion that Sita was a pain in the neck. No doubt he had come to the same conclusion about her. ‘The Moroks are armed,’ she said slowly, emphasizing each syllable.

‘So we take them from the Moroks?’ Sita sneered and turned away to look out of the door.

‘Why not?’ Vicki blurted out angrily. ‘That is revolution!’

But Sita kept his back to her. He had had enough of this nonsense.

‘Vicki, we have tried,’ Tor said in a more reasonable tone of voice. ‘We’ve occasionally overpowered a guard and taken his ray gun. But what can one gun - or even two, or three - do against an army, no matter how small it is?’

‘And even when that happens,’ Sita turned back into the conversation to hammer home the point, ‘they take hostages until the gun is returned.’ And he turned away again, folding his arms and leaning against the door jamb.

But Vicki wasn’t going to let the matter rest there.

‘Where are the guns kept?’ she asked.

‘In the armoury,’ Gyar said. He was a little embarrassed at Sita’s display of bad manners, being too trusting himself to realise that Sita was only trying to protect them.

‘If you had guns, lots of them - would you be able to organise your friends? Distribute the guns? Really fight?’

asked Vicki.

‘ *This is not a game, Vicki!* ’ Sita swung back and almost spat out the words in his anger. ‘We are talking about life and... and death.’

He added the last two words quietly and Vicki answered him just as quietly. ‘I know that,’ she said.

Sita looked at her for a long time and his manner became almost conciliatory. ‘The armoury is out of our reach,’ he said.

‘Don’t you know where it is?’

‘We know. And we could take you there. But what good would it do?’

‘I don’t understand,’ Vicki said.

‘The armaments are kept behind locked doors, an impregnable safe,’ Tor explained.

‘Are there guards?’ Vicki asked.

‘There’s no need. It’s protected by an electronic brain programmed to ask a set of questions. The answers given, if they’re the right ones, will open the doors. But they only open to the truth.’

‘I see, a sort of lie-detector. Well... let’s go and have a look at it. Take me there.’ No-one moved. ‘Well?’ Vicki looked from one to the other. What was the matter with them? When it came to action were they incapable of acting? Why did they all stand there staring at her like that? Why didn’t somebody at least say something?

It was Gyar who finally spoke for them. ‘But why are you so interested in us, Vicki?’ he asked. ‘Why do you want this revolution so much?’

So that was it. They didn’t trust her. There was no accusation in Gyar’s voice but the implication was there all the same. It was Sita who had planted the seeds of distrust and those seeds were taking root.

‘I have just as many reasons as you,’ she said softly, ‘to want to see the future changed. Perhaps I’ll explain later.

But, in the meantime, I have three friends in very great danger. I think we should go now. Tor... take me to the armoury.’

Despite the prodding of the gun in his back, the guard suddenly stopped. ‘What’s wrong?’ Ian whispered, looking around. He could see nothing that indicated any danger.

‘This is the building,’ the guard said.

‘Well, take me in then.’

‘It would be better to wait.’

Ian raised the gun to the Morok’s cheek and the man went on hurriedly, ‘There will be fewer guards later. You would stand a better chance.’

‘Why should there be...?’ But Ian didn’t have time to complete the question, someone was coming. ‘Find out if they’ve caught the others,’ he hissed. ‘I’ll be covering you from here.’ He indicated a pilaster behind which he could hide and made cover with a second to spare as Ogrek came into view and stopped on seeing the guard.

‘What are you doing here?’ Lobos would have been delighted at Ogrek’s change of tone. He eyed the guard suspiciously.

‘"The Governor sent for me, sir.’ The man snapped to attention. ‘I am to report to him.’

‘Then what are you doing loafing about here? What is your number?’

‘Eight-double-five-four-three-five, sir!’

‘Well, Eight-double-four-five-three-five, you didn’t leave your post unguarded I trust.’

‘My replacement hadn’t arrived when I left, sir, but...’

‘Fool, idiot, uncomprehending nincompoop,’ Ogrek growled, hitting what was, for him, point nine on the Richter scale.

‘It was the G-go-go-governor’s order, sir,’ the man stammered. ‘He said, immediately, sir.’

‘Did he?’ Ogrek stood, feet apart, hands clasped behind his back, and sniffed loudly. Though whether this expression of disdain was for the Governor or the guard no-one could tell. (It was, in fact, probably for both.) ‘All right, I’ll attend to your replacement. But you report to me after you have seen the Governor.’

‘Yes, sir!’

‘And make sure you do, Eight-double-three-five-four-five, because I won’t forget your number and, if you don’t, your number will be up.’ And, rather pleased with his attempt at humour, Ogrek turned on his heel and strode away.

‘Sir?’

Ogrek stopped and turned back. ‘What is it now, soldier?’ He used the word ‘soldier’ because he had already forgotten the number and didn’t want to have to ask for it again.

‘Have the aliens been captured, sir?’

‘What’s that to do with you?’ Ogrek rumbled. ‘However, if you’re really interested, the answer is "no". But not to worry, the Zaphra Gas will soon drive them out of their hidey-holes and then...’ He pointed a finger at the guard and imitated the sound of a ray gun. Then he disappeared in the direction of the TARDIS.

Ian emerged from his hiding place. ‘You did very well,’

he said.

‘I’m a dead man,’ the guard replied, running his tongue over his upper lip.

‘What is this Zaphra Gas?’ Ian asked.

‘Gas,’ the Morok replied.

Ian wondered if the commander was right and the man was a

complete nincompoop. ‘What does it do?’ he enquired, as patiently as he could.

‘Oh! It doesn’t kill, if that’s what you’re worried about.

It paralyses. But it’s quite slow, takes time. And, before the paralysis sets in, it causes a lot of pain. That is why the commander believes it will drive them out. They wouldn’t be able to stand the agony. I’ve seen it work. It’s not a pretty sight I can tell you.’

‘But it takes time, you say.’ The guard nodded. ‘Then let’s make the most of the time we have. Come.’ And Ian waved the guard to lead him on.

‘I think we can safely move now,’ Dako said, his ear pressed to the door. ‘I suppose all that extra activity was part of the search but it seems to be quiet now.’

‘Can we get out of here?’ Barbara asked.

Dako nodded. ‘There are many guards,’ he said. ‘But I will find a way. Though, somehow, I don’t like it being this quiet. One minute they’re swarming all over the place and then - nothing.’ He still had his ear to the door.

‘It could be a trap,’ Barbara whispered. ‘They could have posted guards at various vantage points with orders to maintain silence in the hopes that we would come out.’

‘Well, we can’t stay here forever,’ Dako replied. ‘We’ll have to risk it. Give me that.’ He held out his hand, indicating the metal bar which she still held. She passed it to him. ‘And you take this.’ He opened his jacket and passed her his gun. ‘If we hit trouble, I will create a diversion and you try to shoot your way out.’

Barbara looked down at the gun in her hand and then back at Dako. The grey eyes regarded her steadily. She held out the gun to him.

‘No,’ she said. ‘I couldn’t do that. One for all and all for one.’

‘Is that an Earth expression?’ he asked.

‘Sort of.’ She smiled.

‘I like it,’ he said. ‘One for all and all for one.’ He returned her smile and took back the gun. ‘The light,’ he said, and nodded towards the

switch. She obeyed his command. The panel in the ceiling started to close giving her just time and light enough to get back to the door before the room was once again pitch dark. Dako waited a second or two before opening the door. The corridor was deserted. They moved out.

Vicki had lost all sense of time and had no idea how far they had travelled since leaving the secret meeting chamber. Most of their journey took them through underground passages. And although Tor led the way with a light, its illumination was sometimes insufficient, and Vicki would stumble or cry out as she grazed an elbow on an unseen outcrop of rock. Finally Gyar took her hand and guided her, sometimes whispering an instruction: 'Lower your head, Vicki. The roof slopes here'; or, 'Be careful, the passage gets narrow and there's an overhang. It's easier if you go sideways'; or, 'The floor is very crumbly and uneven, take it slowly.'

The Xerons did indeed seem to know every inch of the way. They must have traversed these subterranean passages time and time again without the Moroks suspecting a thing. Vicki had the feeling the light was there simply for her benefit or, considering what little good it did, for her comfort, though it was more of a comfort to feel Gyar's firm but gentle grip on her hand, despite the coldness of his touch. The Xerons, Vicki thought, must have a body temperature considerably lower than that of human beings.

His fingers felt almost icy.

Sometimes the passages would open out into larger chambers from which other passages led off. If one could get so easily lost in the museum, down here one could be lost for eternity. Vicki shuddered at the thought. 'What are these places?' she asked.

'We don't know,' Gyar replied. 'Long before the Great Peace, so it is told, the Xerons were given to much quarrelling which led to a terrible disaster. For a long time after, the survivors had to live down here until the surface of the planet was habitable again. Then the tunnels and chambers were sealed up so the Moroks never got to know about them.'

'Like the tombs of the Pharaohs,' Vicki said.

'I suppose so,' Gyar answered, wondering what Pharaohs were. 'We're almost there.' They entered a tunnel, the floor of which rose steeply, and soon found themselves facing a solid wall. At least that was what

Vicki thought until Tor, and his light, suddenly vanished.

‘What’s happened?’ Vicki gasped.

‘It’s all right, Vicki,’ Gyar whispered. ‘Give time for Sita to go and then we’ll follow. Bo will bring up the rear.’

‘Go? Go where? Through a hole in the floor?’

‘No.’ Vicki knew, by the sound of his voice, that Gyar was smiling in the dark. ‘Through a hole in the wall, or rather, between the walls. Come.’ She felt the pressure of his hand pull her forward and then they stopped. ‘Now, Vicki, you’ll have to move sideways, it is very narrow.

Keep very close to me. We’ll move slowly.’ He pulled her forward again and then to one side. Her back grazed a wall.

‘Look over your shoulder, Vicki,’ Gyar instructed. ‘Keep your head turned to the side.’ She felt the pressure of the wall in front. They had entered a gap of no more than ten inches. Vicki was suddenly stricken with panic. It was like being entombed alive. She felt crushed. With a little squeal she tried to pull back but Gyar tightened his grip. ‘Take her other hand, Bo,’ he ordered.

Vicki felt Bo move up to her other side. His fingers touched her arm and moved down to curl around her hand.

The iciness of his touch did nothing to assuage her feeling of panic. If anything it intensified it. She had to get out before she suffocated. It was the sound of Gyar’s calm, soothing voice that eventually brought her around:

‘Breathe deeply, Vicki. Take deep, slow breaths. We don’t have far to go. Just relax... relax...’ They waited a moment, then he went on, ‘Are you all right now?’

Vicki nodded, swallowing hard, and then realising that in the pitch dark she couldn’t be seen, was about to find her voice when Gyar went on: ‘Good. Let’s go.’ He pulled at her hand and they moved on, crab-fashion. How did he know? Vicki thought. Can they see in the dark? Or did he sense the change in me?

‘Bo, let go of my hand please,’ she said out loud. ‘I feel I can’t protect myself with both hands trapped.’

‘Trapped? There’s nothing to protect yourself from,’

Gyar said. ‘Trust me.’

‘I do trust you.’ She looked hard at where she hoped he was looking at her and, if he could see in the dark, would see her look of faith. ‘But I’d still feel happier with one hand free.’

‘Let go of her hand, Bo.’

Bo did so and Vicki immediately put it out to feel the wall in front of her. ‘It doesn’t get any narrower I hope,’

she whispered.

‘No," Gyar said. ‘It stops.’

‘Stops?’ Vicki squeaked.

‘Yes, we’re here.’

‘Here!’

‘Yes. Bo will give you a lift up onto my shoulder. Raise your foot.’

‘I can’t,’ Vicki protested. ‘There’s not enough room.’

‘Yes, you can. It’s wide enough here.’

‘Oh, is it?’ Vicki shrugged and pulled a face, then tentatively lifted her left leg and felt her foot cupped in Bo’s hand. They *can* see in the dark, she thought. Bo’s hand pushed upwards and, guided by Gyar, she rested her foot on his shoulder.

‘Now the other one,’ he said. ‘Balance yourself against the wall and put your other foot on my right shoulder.’

Vicki lifted her right leg and felt her foot come into contact with something. ‘Oops! Sorry!’ she said. ‘Did I kick you?’

‘It’s all right.’ His right hand guided her foot until it was safely in place. ‘Comfortable?’ he asked.

‘Well, yes, I suppose so,’ she replied. ‘But what am I supposed to be doing up here?’

‘I’m going to push you up further. You can’t fall, so don’t be afraid.

When I've pushed you as high as I can you'll feel a ledge in front of you. Crawl onto it.'

Vicki started to sway. She felt as though she were going to faint. Gyar gripped her ankles to steady her and then held his hands just in front of his shoulders, palms upwards. 'Now. Vicki,' he coaxed her, 'step onto my hands.' He tapped his fingers against her shoes to show her where they were. She eased her feet from his shoulders, one after the other and, as she felt Gyar grip them, she also felt a sudden upward rush as he straightened his arms. She let out a shriek and reached out into the darkness. There was nothing. She wobbled wildly, stretching out her flailing arms, contacted the ledge and hoisted herself onto it, scrambling away from the edge.

She lay there, gasping and trembling with fright. Now where was she? In limbo. A black void. It was a trap! Were they going to leave her there? Was this their way of getting rid of her?

'Gyar!' she screamed, 'Gyar! Where are you?'

'It's all right, Vicki. I'm here.' His voice came from the darkness below.

'Don't leave me!' She heard him laugh. 'It's not funny!'

she said.

'No, I know it's not,' he replied, still chuckling. 'But what made you think I'm going to leave you? I'm coming up to join you.'

'Oh!' Vicki suddenly felt a little ashamed. 'But how are you going to get up?' she asked.

'Oh! we can use the walls,' he said. And it wasn't long before he was beside her and they were waiting for Bo.

'There,' he said. 'You see?' He took her hand again and, somehow, it didn't seem as cold as before. 'You should learn to trust your friends,' he admonished her gently as Bo joined them.

'What happens now?' Vicki asked.

'We're above the armoury,' Gyar explained. 'Tor and Sita are waiting for us. Come; but keep your head down, there isn't much room.' He pulled her to her feet.

'Ouch!' she yelled.

‘I told you to keep low. Double up. Are you all right?’

Vicki didn’t even bother to reply. She merely nodded, rubbing her head. ‘Good.’ Gyar led her forward once more and now she knew they could see in the dark from which she suddenly heard Tor’s voice.

‘Ready?’ the voice asked.

Vicki presumed Gyar must have given Tor the nod because he removed his hand from hers and placed it on her shoulder, applying enough pressure to indicate he wanted her to kneel. She did so and a sudden shaft of light, probably after the darkness seeming more brilliant than it was, almost blinded her. She flinched, turning her face away and shielding her eyes with her hand. When she turned back she saw that Tor had removed a small section of floor and the light was streaming up from below, illuminating the five figures kneeling around it. Sita now dropped what looked like a coil of heavy nylon cord through the aperture and knotted the end he still held around a beam. He tugged at the cord a couple of times to make sure it was secure and then looked at Tor who swung his legs over the edge of the hole and lowered himself through it. Sita quickly followed.

Gyar gave Vicki’s shoulder a squeeze. ‘Follow me,’ he said, and disappeared. Vicki looked over the edge and went cold from head to toe. Did they really expect her to do this? Yes, they did: three faces looked up from a long way down waiting for her to join them. And, when she did not, three arms gestured for her to hurry it up. Vicki turned an appealing face to Bo.

‘Go on, Vicki,’ he urged, ‘it’s not that high really, it only looks it.’ Vicki took another look and gulped. ‘Really?’ she said.

‘Yes, truly! It’s not hard. I’ve done it and I’m a terrible coward.’

‘Are you, Bo?’

‘Terrible. I’m afraid of almost everything.’ He grinned at her. She couldn’t help but laugh.

‘Will you help me?’ she asked.

‘Of course,’ Bo said. ‘That’s what I’m here for.’

Vicki took a very deep breath and swung her legs over the edge. She felt her toes curl. ‘Put the rope between your legs,’ Bo said, ‘and hook one foot behind the other. That’s right. Here…’ He held out the rope

so that she could grip it with both hands, then he lay flat on his stomach, hooked a foot behind the beam and put his arms around her, taking most of the weight as she went over the edge. ‘All right?’ he asked.

Vicki nodded and Bo let go of her. Slowly she lowered herself, not daring to look down. The Xerons held the rope steady for her but it seemed an eternity before she felt their arms ease her down the last few feet and she almost collapsed, sobbing and laughing with relief. It would take some time for her trembling to subside but now, added to that, there was a feeling of exhilaration.

Laughing, she looked up at Bo and waved. He waved back and Vicki had a sudden terrifying thought. She had got down all right, how was she expected to get back? But, before she could put this question to the others, Bo started to raise the cord.

‘What’s he doing that for?’ she asked, watching the cord snake upwards.

‘We go back a different way,’ Tor said. Vicki heaved a sigh of relief and watched as Bo gave one final wave and replaced the missing panel from the ceiling. Only then did Vicki take in her new surroundings.

They were in a large, semi-circular foyer in the centre of which stood the electronic brain housed in a transparent integument. Beyond that were two enormous metal doors guarded by a series of unbroken light beams at various heights. The four intruders looked from the electronic brain to the doors and back to the brain. They gathered around it. Its soft, pulsating lights illuminated their faces even in the harsher light of the foyer and were as fascinating as newborn puppies but they obviously weren’t going to learn anything just by looking at it.

‘Can you make it work?’ Tor asked.

Vicki shrugged and pulled a face. ‘Break the light beam,’

she said.

‘The questions will start!’ Sita objected.

‘Of course. How do I know if I can do anything if I don’t know how it works?’

‘Sita.’ Tor jerked his head in the direction of the doors.

‘I’ll do it.’ Gyar moved towards the doors. He hesitated for a moment in front of the beams and then stepped forward. A voice broke the silence.

‘Do you have the Governor’s permission to approach?’

‘Yes,’ Vicki said.

They waited. There was nothing.

‘You see? You see?’ Tor sounded almost censorious.

‘You lied. It just knows when you’re lying.’

‘Try it again,’ Vicki said.

Gyar stepped out of the beams and stepped in again. ‘Do you have the Governor’s permission to approach?’ came the voice again.

‘No,’ said Vicki.

‘Give your name, rank, and number.’

‘Vicki. I am a time-traveller. Number four.’

Silence. Vicki stared at the machine, sorely tempted to give it a slap like a faulty electrical appliance which, under such treatment, might be persuaded to behave itself.

‘I didn’t lie! I didn’t!’ She insisted.

‘You must have done,’ Tor said.

‘No! My name is Vicki and I am a time-traveller. Oh!’

‘Oh, what?’ Tor asked, noting her sudden embarrassment.

‘Well,’ Vicki replied, ‘we don’t actually have numbers. I just made that up.’ She bit her lip and raised her shoulders apologetically. ‘But, I’ve been thinking, even though I said

"no" to the first question, it went on to ask me the second, didn’t it?’

‘So?’

‘So, I think, whoever programmed this thing never considered for a

moment that anyone would ever approach it without permission or authority of any kind. I mean, if anyone were up to some sort of skulduggery, they'd try forgery. Well, wouldn't they?' She looked from one to the other. The Xerons were staring at her with expressionless faces. 'Precisely,' Vicki said. 'Hey diddle diddle, Gyar's on the fiddle, and Vicki will open the doors.'

Sita and Tor looked at each other. These Earthlings really were the most peculiar creatures. They made up magic incantations, they had terrible eyesight and, Gyar would have added, their hands were hot and clammy and not very pleasant to touch.'

'Shall I try again?' Vicki said. There was a muted chorus of assent, carrying overtones of doubting success, and Vicki motioned Gyar to break the beams once more while she faced the machine. For the third time they heard the question.

'Do you have the Governor's permission to approach?'

'No.'

'Give your name, rank, and number.'

'Vicki, time-traveller, no number.'

'Do you have proper authorisation for the removal of arms?'

'Yes.'

The Xerons looked startled. There was no hesitation in Vicki's reply but she was lying again! She had no

authority. To their utter amazement the brain continued. 'From whom do you have this authority?'

'From Tor, Sita, Gyar, and Bo. Oh, and Dako. Let's not forget Dako.'

'What is their rank?'

'Xeron workers.'

'For what purpose are the arms required?'

' *Revolution!* ' Vicki shouted the word like a battlecry. It echoed around the lofty chamber: ' *Revolution - ution -*

ution... '

The Xerons stood rooted to the floor. She had brought disaster down on them. There would be Moroks everywhere. At the very least the electronic brain would explode in a fit of rage.

Nothing of the kind happened. And what did happen happened in absolute silence: the door slid slowly open.

Barbara touched Dako on the sleeve. He stopped and turned an enquiring face to her. Then looked beyond her.

Had she seen or heard something? He had his gun at the ready but could see nothing suspicious.

'Dako, what is that smell?' she asked.

He refocused on Barbara: 'Smell?' He looked distinctly puzzled. 'What is smell?'

Now it was Barbara's turn to look puzzled. Dako had a nose. She was looking straight at it. And what she could smell was quite pungent. Come to think of it, it was the first thing she had smelt on this planet. Either that or she just hadn't noticed anything before. Dako was still regarding her quizzically. 'You know,' she said, and sniffed a few times to illustrate the sense of smell. Dako sniffed a few times in imitation and shook his head.

'I don't know what it is - this smell.'

'You mean you don't know what the smell is? Or you don't know what it is to smell?'

'I don't know.' He said, icily. 'Come.' And he turned to move away. But Barbara clutched him by the sleeve.

'No, wait! It's getting worse.' She sniffed again. 'Oh, why can't you smell it?'

Dako sniffed, shrugged and moved on. Barbara hesitated, looking distinctly worried, then followed him.

Lobos touched a panel on his console. 'Are the aliens still in the building?' he asked.

'We've seen no movement at all, sir,' was the answer.

'All right. Stay alerted. They'll have to come out soon.'

He leaned back in his chair and looked around just as the door opened and Ian entered followed closely by the guard. Ian held his hands behind his back and, to Lobos, it looked as though he were a prisoner. He did not even look at the guard. Had he done so he might have acted with more caution. As it was, he rose slowly from his chair and walked around the desk to stand face to face with Ian.

'At last.' Lobos smiled grimly. 'You aliens have caused me enough trouble and I am going to see you pay dearly for it.' He turned away to move back to his desk and froze as he felt the muzzle of the gun in the nape of his neck.

'You'll be a fool if you kill me,' he said quietly. 'It will achieve nothing.'

'Possibly,' Ian replied, 'but it might give me great satisfaction.'

'What is it you want?' Lobos asked. 'Your spaceship?'

'Take me to the Doctor, the old man you captured.'

'And if I refuse?'

Ian moved the gun away, aiming past Lobos's ear, and squeezed the trigger. The thin ray of blue light hit the video screen with shattering force, blasting it out of existence and leaving a gaping hole in the wall beyond.

Lobos experienced a moment of regret for the dear departed Matt but was singularly unimpressed by the demonstration of firepower. From long personal experience he knew the capabilities of Morok weapons.

'If I take you to the Doctor,' he said matter-of-factly,

'You'll kill me anyway.'

'No. Killing is not part of my nature.'

'Really?' Lobos turned to face him. 'There is always that moment when exception proves the rule. You said yourself it might give you great satisfaction.'

'You're pushing your luck. Quit stalling.'

'Stalling?'

'Wasting time. No-one is coming to rescue you. And, if you don't take

me, someone else will.'

Lobos looked from Ian's grim face down to the gun and back again. He leaned back against the desk and smiled. Ian took a pace back, keeping the gun levelled.

'There's not much point,' Lobos said. 'It's too late for you to help him anyway.'

'What does that mean?'

'Simply what I said. He's beyond your help. Your help, my help, anyone's help.'

'If that is the case...' It was now Ian's turn to sound matter-of-fact but there was no mistaking the menace in his voice... 'then *you* will soon be beyond anyone's help. So perhaps, for your sake, we'd better make sure, hmm?'

There was a long moment and then Lobos pushed himself off the desk and started for the door. He was still smiling. Ian stepped aside to let him pass.

Ogrek approached the TARDIS in front of which stood three soldiers with the cutting equipment. They were wondering what to do, there being no superior around to order them to actually start, and snapped to attention on seeing the second-in-command advancing on them.

'What are you supposed to be doing?' Ogrek growled.

One of the soldiers stepped forward and saluted. 'Sir!

We... well... we requisitioned the cutting gear, sir.' He indicated the cylinders at his feet.

'Yes?'

'We were wondering whether or not to start the job, sir.'

'Were you?' Ogrek glanced around. 'Where is the relief guard for this entrance?'

'There was nobody here when we came back, sir.'

Ogrek raised an eyebrow. He pointed to the first soldier.

'You, take over the watch.'

‘Yes, sir.’ The man saluted again and positioned himself outside the doors to the museum.

‘You two, follow me.’ Ogrek turned and stalked away mumbling to himself. ‘I’m going to get to the bottom of this.’

The guards followed him.

In one of the underground chambers the Xerons were filing past Sita and Bo who, acting as quartermasters, were handing out the purloined weapons.

Vicki stood watching them. ‘I wonder if this has changed the future,’ she thought. To one side, Tor and Gyar were engaged in discussing tactics and Vicki was about to join them when, in front of the table behind which Bo and Sita stood, there appeared a head of spikey blonde hair and an outstretched arm, the hand open, ready to receive the gun it expected to be placed there. Sita and Bo looked at each other and then over the table top. Their own questioning expressions were greeted by a cherubic smile.

‘Who are you?’ Sita asked.

‘Jens,’ came the reply. ‘May I have a gun please?’

‘Gun?’ Vicki thought. ‘The only thing he needs is a haircut.’

‘No, you can’t have a gun,’ Sita told him. ‘You’re from the colony.’ Tor and Gyar approached the table. ‘You’re not even supposed to be in here.’

Sita went on: ‘How did you get in?’

‘I followed the others,’ Jens replied.

‘Well, Jens, you’re really much too young.’ Tor smiled.

‘It’s not that we don’t appreciate your volunteering, or your courage, but...’

‘Can I have my gun please?’ the cherubic smile had given way to a frown, the blue eyes glared, and the voice was insistent.

‘No, Jens,’ Tor said kindly, ‘go back to the colony.’ He looked around. ‘Someone had better take him. He could get caught...’

‘Huh!’ said Jens petulantly.

Tor ignored the interjection. '... and then we're in trouble before we even start.' He concluded.

'I want to fight the Moroks!'

The voice was now coarse and aggressive and the open hand had formed itself into a small fist which hammered on the table top. The hammering stopped and Jens looked around at the circle of faces. He was the centre of attention.

Tor stared at the skinny young would-be warrior and shook his head. How did things like this happen? This child, for he was no more than that - a mere child, had grown up in an environment of almost total passivity in the colony and yet, at the first hint of violent action, he had come running. Was there something atavistic here?

Would there always be those with this streak of aggression?

Was this how it always would be with them? Times of peace interposed by periods of bellicosity. He thought of the stories he had heard of the great disaster. If that were the case was there any point in fighting the Moroks? Or was the kid merely imitating the example of his older brothers? Tor's thoughts may not have been so coherent but this was their gist. Jens was looking straight at him -

waiting. This was not the time to have doubts, or philosophise, or worry about the far distant future. The important thing was here and now - the success of their enterprise.

'I'm sorry, Jens, there will be no gun. And I'll tell you why. If we fail, there might come another time, and then it will be your turn. Do you understand that?'

There was a silence and then Jens nodded.

'Good,' Tor said with relief and turned to Bo. 'Bo, you go with him.'

'Why me?'

Tor continued along his diplomatic track. 'Because it has to be someone I can really trust, that's why. Now don't argue with me. Just go.' Bo nodded and, gesturing for Jens to follow him, turned to go. 'And Bo!' Bo turned back.

'Make sure he stays there.'

Again Bo nodded. ‘I’ll get back as soon as I can,’ he said.

‘Yes.’ Tor turned away.

‘Tor?’ They looked at each other. Tor waited.

‘Nothing.’ Bo said. ‘Just... Revolution!’

‘Revolution,’ Tor said quietly and Jens and Bo disappeared into the darkness. The remainder of the guns were handed out and Vicki watched as the Xerons divided into two groups.

‘What’s the plan of action?’ Vicki asked.

‘Well,’ Tor replied, ‘hopefully we have the benefit of surprise so we are going to try and take the barracks. Gyar will lead the assault group. The plan is for him to hold the barracks with as few men as possible. The Moroks will try to regain them and that’s when the rest of us will attack from the rear. But first a small group of us will try to take headquarters and put Lobos out of action.’

‘Why?’ Vicki asked.

‘Because he’s an old campaigner and that worries me.

He could always be one step ahead of us.’

‘You sound like an old campaigner yourself,’ Vicki. said admiringly.

‘No,’ Tor replied, ‘but we have been planning for a long time and I only hope nothing goes wrong.’

‘Something *has* gone wrong,’ Vicki reminded him.

‘What has happened to Barbara and Dako?’

‘I wish I knew. I’m horribly afraid they must have been caught by now. There’s always the chance they are still being forced to hide but I doubt it. Sita will take Dako’s place and lead the counter-attack outside the barracks and we must move fast because, if they have been caught, there’s no doubt the element of surprise will be lost.’ Tor turned to Gyar and was about to give him the go-ahead to move out when Vicki stopped him.

‘Well, if it’s all the same to you,’ she said, selecting a gun for herself, ‘I am going back to the museum. Barbara and Dako might still be there. I’ve got to find her, Tor, or find out what’s happened to her and my

other friends.'

Tor wanted no more delay: 'Look, Vicki, as soon as we finish...'

'No! It has to be now. It may be too late otherwise.'

'But if you're captured!' Tor protested.

'The Moroks won't know about the revolt - I'm not likely to tell them.'

'You won't have to,' Tor pointed out. 'The gun will give it away. They'll check the armoury. In fact they could be doing that anyway. We have no time to lose, Vicki.'

Vicki thought on this for a moment and then held the gun out to Tor. 'I'm sorry, Tor. I'm still going. I have to try and find them, tell them what's going on. There's no knowing what they'll do otherwise. If... if I am captured, well... Revolution!' She smiled and placed the gun in Tor's hand. Then she turned to go.

'Vicki, wait!' She turned back. Tor looked at Gyar who nodded and moved to Vicki's side. She opened her mouth to protest but Tor raised a hand and stopped her. 'Don't argue, Vicki. Gyar will go with you.'

The preparation room was not as large as Ian had expected.

In his imagination he had seen something resembling an operating theatre and, indeed, it looked just like that, uncluttered and gleaming white. The table to which the Doctor was strapped was inclined in an almost vertical position and Ian stared in dismay at the Time Lord's drawn and waxen features. His eyes were open, staring straight ahead. The only sound was a constant hum, so faint as to be almost inaudible. The three stood in silence for a moment, then Lobos spoke.

'Well?' he said. 'What do you think of our latest specimen?'

'Specimen!' Ian was outraged. 'This is a living creature.

What have you done to him?'

'I don't think you would appreciate the technicalities,'

Lobos said, unable to conceal the disdain in his voice.

'Suffice it to say, he has completed the cryogenic stage of preparation.'

'Is he dead?'

‘As far as you are concerned - yes.’

‘And as far as you are concerned?’

‘As good as.’

Ian could not take his eyes off the Doctor’s face. The image of the four glass cases flashed through his mind.

‘Bring him back,’ he demanded.

‘You don’t know what you’re asking!’

‘I am not asking, I am commanding! Bring him back!’

Ian was almost screaming. Once again he saw in his mind’s eye the glass cases, more particularly the image of himself and, to his horror, he noticed the jacket had a button missing. Was it imagination or true recall? He swung around on Lobos who raised his hands placatingly and turned away to a set of instruments housed in a transparent globe set on a metal column.

‘And remember,’ Ian said, resuming his quiet manner, ‘I shall be watching you very carefully.’

Lobos smiled to himself as he adjusted the instruments.

‘Will watching me carefully make you any the wiser if you do not understand the process?’

‘Just don’t try any tricks, that’s all.’ Ian knew his position was almost hopeless. Lobos could do whatever he chose and he was powerless to stop him. He could only hope.

‘There are no tricks in science, Earthling, only facts.

Now, Doctor - let us see if we can put some colour back in those cheeks.’

Ian watched anxiously, noting the sound of the hum increasing in volume, but there appeared to be no change in the Doctor’s condition.

‘How long will it take?’ he asked.

‘That is difficult to say,’ Lobos replied. ‘He is old.

Recovery might take some time. Perhaps... perhaps he never will.’

Ian was not the only one feeling totally helpless at that moment. Barbara knelt beside the prostrate figure of Dako wondering desperately what she could do. He had been growing weaker and weaker and, despite her urgings, his movements seemed to get slower until, suddenly, he hit the floor as though felled by a violent blow, only yards from the main entrance. She took him by the shoulder and hip and turned him onto his back. His eyes were open. His breathing was shallow and laboured.

'Dako! Dako!' she cried. 'Can you hear me?' He gave an almost imperceptible nod. 'Try and get up. Give me your hand, I'll help you.' She grasped his hand, gasped, and almost let it drop again. The iciness of his skin made her think he must be near to death to be so cold. He tried to say something.

She leaned over him, her ear close to his mouth, and managed to catch his whispered words: 'I - can't - move -

can't - move.' Barbara looked over her shoulder to where she could see the doors - so close. She turned back to him.

'But we're nearly there, Dako. We're nearly there. Try, just try. Oh, please, try!'

Dako stared at her and she felt a tension in his shoulders as he tried to lift himself but it was hopeless. She was beginning to feel pins and needles in her legs and a numbness in her fingertips. That smell! It was in her nostrils, the taste of it on her tongue, it irritated her throat.

She coughed. Must be some kind of gas and, obviously, it affected the Xerons faster than it did human beings. But she still had strength, enough, she thought, to be able to drag Dako to the door. She positioned herself behind his head, lifted him up and thrust her arms through his, interlacing her fingers over his chest. Then, slowly and painfully, feeling herself growing gradually weaker, she started to drag his dead weight towards the door.

On the far side of the museum, Vicki and Gyar were about to enter the building when Vicki suddenly pulled back.

'What is it?' Gyar asked.

'That smell!' Vicki said, sniffing.

'Smell?'

‘Yes. Can’t you smell it?’

‘What is it, this smell?’

‘That’s what I’m asking you!’ Vicki hissed with some vexation.

‘I don’t know what it is - smell.’

‘You mean you don’t know what the smell is, or what it is to smell?’

‘I don’t know,’ Gyar said, though he didn’t get annoyed as Dako had done. He was merely perplexed.

Vicki’s eyes narrowed. She sniffed again. Gyar was quite fascinated.

‘I don’t like it,’ Vicki said. ‘Whatever it is. Is there another way to get to the main entrance?’

‘Of course,’ Gyar said. ‘Lots of ways.’

‘Then let’s go another way - preferably where there is no smell.’

‘No smell,’ Gyar said and hoped Vicki would sniff again.

It was an interesting trick.

‘His temperature should soon return to normal,’ Lobos said.

‘How long?’

‘I don’t know. After a temperature of several hundred degrees below freezing it’s difficult to judge. I have never tried before to reverse the process.’

Ian glanced toward the guard who was still looking decidedly miserable as he brooded over his own predicament. He had two alternatives - death in the preparation room or death after a summary court-martial.

A no-hope situation. Betwixt the devil and the deep blue sea as it were, if he had known what either the devil or the deep blue sea meant. Then, on the other hand, maybe there was a third way. Maybe this maniacal Earth-thing would kill the Governor and he, Pluton, number 804732, would escape with a reprimand. He mentally urged the Earth-thing to blast Lobos out of existence. But the Earth-thing didn’t respond. Instead he turned back to look at the Doctor whose condition seemed to be unaltered.

‘Go on!’ Pluton silently urged, his eyes practically boring holes in Ian’s skull. ‘It’s not going to work. Kill him! Kill him!’ But Lobos’s voice interupted his concentration.

‘Normal body temperature has been reached,’ the voice said.

Ian moved into a position beside the Doctor from where he could lay his hand on the Doctor’s forehead and still keep a wary eye on his prisoners.

‘Well?’ Lobos asked.

Ian nodded. ‘He’s warm.’

‘Good!’ Lobos beamed. ‘then we shouldn’t have long to wait.’

‘Not very long at all,’ the Doctor said.

‘Doctor!’ Ian exclaimed with unabashed delight.

‘Well, don’t just stand there, boy,’ the Doctor snapped back. ‘Help me out of this confounded contraption.’

‘Of course,’ Ian said and, with one hand, unclipped the buckles that held the Doctor in position. As the last one went the Doctor sagged and lan hurriedly put out an arm to support him. Lobos, sensing an opportunity, darted towards them but Ian’s reaction was swift and Lobos found himself staring into the muzzle of the gun. He backed off.

The disappointed guard shook his head.

‘Over there,’ Ian said, waving the gun in Pluton’s direction, and Lobos obeyed.

‘Oh, never mind about him, Chesterton,’ the Doctor grumbled as Ian watched Lobos cross the room. ‘Help me to a chair.’

‘Are you all right?’ Ian asked as he sat the Doctor in the only one available.

‘Splendid. Splendid!’ was the reply. ‘No, not splendid at all,’ was the contradiction. ‘An acute attack of rheumatism, agh!’ The Doctor rolled a shoulder to ease the pain.

‘Always comes on with the cold.’

‘Does it?’ Ian said, realising the Doctor was almost his old self. ‘I don’t

recollect ever hearing you complain before.'

'Possibly not. That's because I'm not the complaining type. And, anyway, it's been a long time since I last encountered that sort of temperature.' He huffed and puffed a bit and rubbed his knees.

Lobos leaned towards the guard. 'When I give the word, rush him,' he whispered. Pluton turned as white as a sheet and gulped. Looking straight ahead, he nodded. Lobos glanced sideways and took note of the guard's expression.

'And that's an order,' he hissed out of the corner of his mouth.

The Doctor shivered violently and, crossing his arms, slapped himself a few times, stretched his arms out and wiggled his fingers, then went back to rubbing his knees and stretching and bending each leg in turn. 'We'd better get the circulation going again,' Ian said, starting to rub the Doctor's shoulder with his free hand, but the Doctor irritably slapped his hand away.

'It's got nothing to do with the circulation,' he growled.

'Stop fussing. Don't do that!'

'Now!' Lobos hissed and Pluton stumbled forward. Ian swung the gun in his direction, Pluton's fingers reached for the ceiling, and he hurriedly backed off to the wall. The Doctor burst out laughing.

'Really, my dear Governor,' he chuckled, 'your soldiers don't seem to have any heart for their job at all, do they?'

Pluton felt his legs turn to jelly. It was definitely going to be the court-martial.

'Oh, and thank you for getting me out of that little predicament,' the Doctor continued, motioning towards the table.

'The pleasure was all mine,' Lobos said icily.

'I'm sure.' The Doctor got to his feet and stamped a few times, feeling the strength in his legs. 'Although I would have been better pleased if you had done it voluntarily.

Though, of course, that was too much to expect, far, far too much.'

'Yes,' Ian said, 'his conscience did need a little pricking.'

‘I know, my boy, I know,’ the Doctor replied, not looking up from his knees, in fact trying to look behind them as though fitting on a new pair of pants.

‘You knew?’

‘Of course.’ He finally looked up. ‘Well I wasn’t dead, was I? If I had died I wouldn’t be standing here talking to you now, would I? No, I was merely - how shall I put it? - I wasn’t a frozen stiff, I was just frozen stiff.’

Ian smiled. The experience couldn’t have been that damaging. ‘So you knew what was going on all the time?’

‘Oh, from the moment you came in. Before that, of course, it was very dull, being in here all on my own.’

‘It must have been. Though I seem to recall you quite enjoy your own company.’

‘Only for a limited period, my boy, strictly limited. Let me see now, I compiled two Sanskrit crossword puzzles, a little Ribon verse, and even managed a few square roots.

All very boring. I wasn’t looking forward to spending the next few hundred years working out the recessive velocities of quasars or the quaquaversal structure of certain elements or quantum numbers in my head. Oh, and that reminds me of something I did think of.’ He turned to Lobos. ‘Tell me, Governor, have the Moroks ever visited Earth?’ Lobos shook his head. ‘Then how is it there are certain Earth exhibits in your museum?’

‘If you’re really interested,’ Lobos proposed, ‘we could consult the central computer.’

‘No, no, I don’t suppose it really matters. Let’s just assume they got lost and became the flotsam and jetsam of space.’

‘Doctor!’ Ian was mortified at the doctor’s sanguine attitude, considering his blood had just been frozen, and this was hardly the time for idle chit-chat. ‘There was something else of much more importance you could have turned your mind to.’

‘Oh? And what was that, dear boy?’

‘What has happened to Vicki and Barbara! And how are we going to

get out of here? We must have changed our future by now.'

'Hmm, I'm not really sure about that, Chesterton, my boy. Have we? Or have we been merely following the prescribed train of events? Although, I hasten to add, I hope not. Because, having once experienced that thing...'

He pointed to the table... 'I don't want to do it again. Of course it would be easier for you because once hypothermia had set in...'

'Doctor!' Ian was at his wits end. Was there no way of keeping him to the point?

'Yes?'

'How are we going to get out of here?' Ian laid all the emphasis he could on each word.

'I don't think you are.' It was Lobos who answered the question. He was looking beyond Ian towards the door. Ian swung around following the direction of his gaze.

In the doorway stood Ogrek with his guards. Three ray guns were levelled at Ian and the Doctor.

Pluton fainted.

6

The Final Phase

Barbara felt an excruciating pain in her hands and almost screamed out loud. Her fingers seemed to be clamped together, held in a vice that tightened with each passing second. She was gasping for breath as she tugged at the lifeless Dako.

She looked over her shoulder. The doors seemed to recede like a mirage in a desert. The walls and floor appeared to undulate. The exhibits in their cabinets pulsated and changed shape like living things. Her legs no longer belonged to her. Then, it was almost as if she had switched to automatic pilot, her real self was somewhere above her, watching her efforts growing more and more enfeebled. She fell against the door, coughing violently and trembling with exertion, held there by the weight of Dako's body until the doors slid open and they tumbled out in a heap at the feet of the Morok guard.

The last thing she remembered was his face as he leered down at her, his lips pulled back from teeth and gums. She thought he was a wolf.

Ogrek was feeling quite pleased with himself. For once he had done something fairly positive without having to expend a great deal of thought and energy.

Pluton was not feeling pleased with anything. He knew only that death was staring him in the face, and he wasn't very good at staring out anybody, let alone death.

Lobos was feeling particularly dyspeptic and had momentarily run out of medication which only made him more tense and increased the pain between his shoulder blades.

What the Doctor was feeling was anybody's guess but Ian was decidedly dejected. He kept fingering the sleeve of his jacket, alternately brooding over the missing button and wondering what had happened to their companions.

He hardly heard Ogrek's words as the second-in-command droned on.

'I met this soldier on his way here, asked him what he was doing, and he said he was reporting to you - on your orders.'

Lobos nodded, he was in too much pain to speak, and turned to glare at Pluton who felt, if there was anything to be said in self-defence, he had better start defending without delay:

'Iwasaprisonerofoneofthealienssirhehadagun!'

Lobos nodded again and waited a second or two for his brain to unscramble the gobbledegook his ears had just taken in. 'Which he took from you.'

Pluton was reduced to a quivering wreck but his body defied his fervent wishes and obstinately refused to faint for a second time.

'I posted a relief guard,' Ogrek ground on, 'and came back here to find out what was going on.'

'Just as well,' Lobos admitted grudgingly. 'This...' He waved a finger towards Pluton, whatever his number was, not wishing to honour him with the appellation of soldier, the word would have stuck in his throat... 'Is under close arrest.' A light started to flash on his desk. 'What is it?'

‘637294, relief guard, main entrance, sir. One alien is my prisoner. She is accompanied by one of the outside workers, sir.’

Lobos looked across the room to Ogrek. ‘What was an outside worker doing in the building?’ Then turned back to the intercom. ‘Hold them,’ he ordered. ‘I’m sending reinforcements.’ He leaned back in his chair. ‘So... they made contact did they?’ He leaned forward again and touched another control on the panel, waited, tried again, and a third time. ‘Strange - no reply from the barracks.’ He tried once more and gave up, turned to look directly at Pluton. ‘It seems a fault in our communication system has given our cowardly friend here another chance. You three, go with the commander. Bring the aliens to me, and any Xerons with them.’

Ogrek cast a glance towards Ian and the Doctor. ‘Oh, don’t worry about them,’ Lobos chuckled. ‘I think they’ll be quite safe with me.’ The four Moroks saluted, did an about-face, and marched out.

‘Well, my friends,’ Lobos said expansively, ‘It looks as though this little diversion will soon be over and you will be reunited with your compatriots. Who knows, perhaps for a very long time. Until the fall of the Morok Empire wouldn’t you say, Doctor?’ Lobos beamed. The pain in his back had miraculously disappeared.

The effects of the gas were wearing off but Barbara still found difficulty in moving and Dako had not stirred. A low groan gave some indication, however, that he might be coming around. The soldier stood over them, warily eyeing Barbara. He knew the Xeron was helpless but who knew what surprises these aliens might have up their sleeves?

The surprise, however, came from another direction. A voice suddenly called out: ‘Soldier!’

The guard turned and Gyar zapped him before the expression of surprise had even left his face. He did a backward double somersault, hit the wall of the museum and what was left of him crashed to the ground. Vicki was immediately at Barbara’s side, helping her to her feet, while Gyar went to the assistance of the stricken Dako.

‘Barbara, are you all right?’ Vicki fussed. ‘You look terrible!’

‘Thank you very much,’ Barbara said, being helped to her not too steady legs and primly brushing herself down.

‘Yes, I think I’m all right.’ She delicately pushed back a lock of hair

with one finger and then remembered: ‘Dako!’

They turned to look. Gyar had lifted Dako to a sitting position and was pushing the suffering Xeron’s head between his knees. Releasing him, Dako fell back against Gyar’s chest and looked up. ‘Gyar... where did... you come from? And a gun?’

‘It’s started, Dako. The revolution. Thanks to Vicki.

Can you move? We’ve got to get out of here fast.’

Dako tried to sit up, went into spasm and, with a little cry of pain, rolled over on to his stomach.

‘Dako!’ Gyar started to massage his back. Vicki turned to Barbara.

‘Is Ian still inside?’ she asked.

‘I don’t see how he could be. They’ve used some kind of gas and if he is...’

‘That’s what I could smell,’ Vicki said. ‘Perhaps the guards took him away when we all split up. Perhaps he and the Doctor are together. We’ve got to find them, Barbara!

There’s a chance for us now.’

‘Why? What’s happened?’

‘It’s going to be all right, I know it is. When the revolution’s successful...’

‘When?’

‘Yes, when! The Xerons are going to destroy the museum. We can’t be in a museum that doesn’t exist, can we?’ Vicki was almost bouncing with youthful exuberance and faith but, whether it was the after-effects of the gas or her natural cautiousness, Barbara remained singularly unimpressed. Vicki turned back to Gyar. ‘Gyar, our friends

- the Doctor and Ian - where would the Moroks have taken them?’

‘To the Governor’s headquarters I expect. They’d take them there first.’

‘We’ve got to go there - now!’

‘Certainly. Allow me to escort you.’

Gyar leapt to his feet at the sound of Ogrek’s voice but, before he could raise his gun, Pluton fired and Gyar dropped. Vicki screamed and dived for Gyar’s gun but, before she could reach it, the other guards overpowered her and pulled her away.

Ogrek looked at Pluton and inclined his head slightly.

‘Well, soldier,’ he said, ‘that goes some way towards redeeming yourself.’ Pluton smiled. ‘Take a look at the other one.’

Pluton moved forward and knelt beside Dako as Ogrek bent down and retrieved the fallen gun, inspecting it with interest. The two guards kept their eyes on Barbara and Vicki, and Pluton, seeing he was unobserved, turned Dako over on his back. For a moment they looked at each other and then Pluton whispered, ‘Remember me.’

Dako closed his eyes. Pluton looked up at Ogrek. ‘Sir?’

Ogrek interrupted his examination of the gun. ‘This one is dead, sir.’ Barbara and Vicki exchanged anguished glances and watched as Pluton got up and dusted off his knees, then moved over to rejoin the group. Ogrek turned to Vicki and held out the gun.

‘Where did this come from?’ he asked.

Vicki shrugged. She thought she was going to choke and the tears ran down her cheeks. She wished they wouldn’t.

She would have preferred to nurse her grief in private.

Barbara slipped her arm behind Vicki’s and took her hand.

‘I asked you a question,’ Ogrek persisted.

‘And I don’t know the answer,’ Vicki retorted, turning her face away. Ogrek looked beyond her to one of the guards.

‘Do you know of any recent guerilla action?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Any arms fallen into Xeron hands?’

The guard shook his head. ‘No, sir. Not that I know of, sir.’

Ogrek looked back at Vicki and, using the barrel of the gun against her chin, forced her head around so that she returned his gaze. Her look of defiance persuaded him that any further questioning on the spot would be a waste of time.

'Well,' he said, 'It looks as if the Governor will have more than his usual batch of questions to ask. So you would like to see your companions again, hey? Then let's not waste any more time.' He jerked his head and the guards prodded and shoved the girls away. Vicki cold not resist one last backward glance.

Ogrek stared at Lobos who sat behind his desk and stared at the gun lying there. He turned and stared at the console, leaned across and tried the communication switches again, then stood up. Ogrek had the gravest misgivings - life on Xeros was never going to be the same again. He wished the feeling would go away but it wouldn't. He cleared his throat. 'Sir... you don't think...' Lobos silenced him with a look.

'Of course I think, commander. I think all the time, which is more than anybody else around here seems to do.

If there were others who thought, commander, we might not be in this mess now!'

'Mess, sir?'

'Mess, commander!' Lobos bawled and slapped his open hand down on the desk. 'Why are our communications out? And this...' He picked up the gun and walked around the desk to face Ogrek... 'was never issued. It has come directly from the weapons store.'

'Impossible, sir,' Ogrek protested. 'No-one could break into the armoury.'

Lobos held the gun beneath Ogrek's nose. 'It grew legs and walked out of its own accord?' Ogrek flinched. Lobos turned away. 'Well, we will soon know, when the guards report back. *If* they report.'

'What about...' Ogrek glanced at the wall that separated them from the interrogation room.

'That problem will have to keep.' Lobos put down the gun and leaned on the desk, his back to Ogrek. 'I'm growing old, Ogrek, I'm losing my touch.' He turned back to face his second and sat on the desk, folding his arms.

‘Lack of action makes one senile. Supposing, just supposing, somehow the Xerons have managed to get into the armoury and equip themselves, what would be their first objective?’

Ogrek laughed. ‘Objective? They wouldn’t know an objective if they saw it. They have no military strategy.

They wouldn’t even *think* of an objective.’

‘There we go again - think, think, think. All right,’

Lobos pushed himself away from the desk and started to pace, ‘supposing the situation were reversed and we were in their position, what objective would we have in mind?

With our vast experience of military strategy.’

Ogrek shrugged and the corners of his mouth turned down. ‘The barracks, I suppose.’

‘Ah!’ Lobos looked at the console. ‘The barracks.

Precisely. And then?’

Ogrek looked at the ceiling for inspiration. ‘Well, come on, come on, do some thinking for a change,’ Lobos barked.

Ogrek lowered his gaze. ‘Hold them,’ he said.

‘Precisely. And what does holding them presuppose?’

‘A counter-attack.’

‘Good, good. It took a bit of prompting but I do believe you might actually be thinking at last. So, a counter-attack will be expected and plans laid accordingly. Therefore, assuming the Xerons have attacked and taken the barracks, and are holding them, we will not counter-attack. No, while they are sitting there wondering why we don’t come for them, we will be sitting here, waiting for them to lose patience and come to us. We’ll pick off the reserves they hoped would outflank us and then we’ll worry about the barracks. Deploy all personnel to this complex and be quick about it!’

Ian walked around the cell, feeling the walls with his fingertips. The Doctor sat in the interrogation chair watching him and tapping his own fingertips together in front of his mouth. Barbara and Vicki sat at his feet. Ian suddenly clenched both fists and hammered on the wall in

frustration.

‘You can save your strength, Chesterton,’ the Doctor advised. ‘It’ll take more than that to get us out of this situation.’

‘There must be a way!’ Ian hammered the wall again.

‘There must be!’ He stood back and looked around, shaking his head. Then he focused on his companions. ‘So, is this how it all ends? Exhibits in a forgotten museum?’

‘We’re not there yet,’ the Doctor corrected him.

Vicki nursed her knees in her arms and rocked gently back and forth. ‘We must have changed the future,’ she said quietly, ‘we just must have done.’

The Doctor stretched out a hand and stroked her hair.

‘Have we, Vicki? Or were all those things we did, the steps we took, preordained? Four separate journeys that led us all the time closer to here.’

‘It hasn’t happened yet, you know!’ Vicki said with indignation.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor agreed, ‘I’ve already admitted that, but it’s only a step from here to the preparation room.’

Ian slumped back against the wall, hitting it with a thud, and slid down to sit on the floor. ‘Isn’t it just a question of time?’ he asked.

‘Time? Time? What is time? We’ve already had proof of what tricks time can play.’

‘But what can we do now to change things?’ Barbara joined in, looking around the cell, ‘trapped in a giant tin can.’

‘We can do nothing at the moment,’ the Doctor replied.

‘But why should that be our only hope?’

‘I don’t understand,’ Barbara said.

‘You’ve got to remember, Barbara, that for the short time we’ve been on this planet, we’ve met people, spoken to them, maybe even influenced them more than we imagine.

What was it your famous John Donne wrote? "No man is an island." I should think that applies equally as well to the Xerons. Oh, yes, and the Moroks too.'

'Yes, yes!' Vicki chipped in eagerly. 'You mean, we don't necessarily have to do any more to change our own future. Others could be doing it for us!'

'Hmm... something like that. It would behove members of the human race to remember that everything they think, everything they do, every contact they make with each other carries an infinitesimal responsibility in shaping, not only their own future, but the future of others. So it is with us on Xeros. Our personalities, ourselves, we might have changed things in others that might, or might not, still save us. Of course, you could still call it fate, or predestination, but I like to think we do have some say in the matter.'

'Philosophising won't get us out of this particular pickle, Doctor,' Ian sighed.

'No,' Vicki said. 'But revolution will.'

Dako felt the strength returning to his limbs and raised himself up on his elbows but he dropped back, rolled over, and played possum as he heard the *zit-zit-zit* of ray guns being fired. A group of Moroks, fighting a rearguard action and led by Mort, the one-eyed mercenary from Kreme, headed in his direction, trying to make it to the doors of the museum. Every now and again one of them would turn and let off a blast at their pursuers who returned fire. The air was filled with the tracery of thin blue lines.

A number of Moroks were zapped into oblivion before Mort and two of his men managed to make the safety of the building, the fire from the Xerons ripping jagged holes in the outer skin of the doors as they closed. Dako pressed himself into the ground, wishing it would open up and swallow him. Being caught in the crossfire had almost totally unnerved him and, even when he heard Tor's voice, he made no move. It wasn't until he felt the hand on his shoulder that he looked up.

'Dako! Dako!'

Dako looked up at his friend and grinned, then he chuckled, then he laughed, then he found himself trembling violently and burst into tears. Tor helped him to sit up and Dako clutched at him desperately. There was another burst of fire from the Xeron guns as a second group

of Moroks appeared and disappeared, beating a hasty retreat and leaving three of their number on the ground.

Tor tried to prise Dako's fingers from his jacket but gave up and, instead, put his arms around his companion, holding him tight and gently soothing him.

'It's all right, Dako. It's all right. It's the shock. It will wear off. Shh... it's all right.'

Dako pulled himself away and looked at Tor. 'I owe my life to a Morok,' he said. Tor looked puzzled. 'Yes, he told the commander I was dead and they left me here. I don't know why he did that. It was the same one who shot Gyar.'

'Are you feeling all right now?' Tor asked. Dako nodded. 'You're not hurt.'

'No. But Gyar...'

Tor got up and went over to where Gyar lay. He knelt beside him and turned him over.

'Remember me. That's what he said. Remember me.'

Tor looked across at Dako and grinned. 'And I know why,' he said. 'He had his weapon on stun. Gyar will be all right. That's two lives he saved.'

'And possibly his own,' Dako added. He was on his feet now and ready to meet anything.

'Merk! Gael!' Tor called two of the Xerons over to him and indicated the prostrate figure of Gyar. 'Get him out of here.' Then he turned back to Dako.

'How does it go?' Dako asked.

'We took the barracks easily, as planned. But there has been no counter-attack. I think the surprise we gave them has got them on the run.' He paused to watch as Merk and Gael carried Gyar away and then turned back to Dako.

'What happened to Vicki and Barbara?'

'They've been taken.'

‘That means headquarters.’

Dako nodded. ‘Ogrek and his men, including the one who saved my life.’

‘Headquarters. I knew we should have attacked there first and put Lobos out of action. Now he will be waiting for us.’

‘But we can’t stop now!’ Dako cried.

‘No, we can’t stop now. And we have to move fast. But a frontal attack on that complex would be certain suicide.

And we can’t destroy the buildings, not with the Earthlings inside. It would have to be the one building we can’t get into by a secret way and laying siege would take too long. While we’re sitting around the Moroks could call up reinforcements. Then we’re caught in the same position we hoped they would be in outside their barracks. Lobos has got us. But there must be a way. There must be!’

‘The Trojan Horse!’ Dako cried.

‘What?’

‘The Trojan Horse! Barbara told me about it. When we were hiding in the museum. We were talking, to pass the time, and she told me all sorts of things. There were these two armies, you see, one inside a city and the other laying siege, and the army outside decided they’d had enough and wanted to go home so they...’ Dako eagerly related the story and Tor listened with interest, though neither of them had any idea what a horse looked like or even what it was, apart from being some creature mankind had domesticated to be used as a beast of burden, in war, and for sport. It sounded a fascinating animal and the Trojan one was enormous and made of wood, whatever wood might be. Dako might not have got all his facts correct but the gist of the story was there.

‘But we haven’t got a horse,’ Tor objected. ‘There isn’t time to build one and, anyway, what would the Moroks open their doors for?’

‘It’s the principle,’ Dako argued. ‘All we’ve got to do is find some way of getting them to open the doors and let us in without arousing suspicion.’

‘All right,’ Tor said. ‘Let’s find a way to do just that.’

Lobos sat at his desk waiting impatiently for the technician to install a replacement video screen. He felt blind without one, ignorant of what was happening outside, unable to command without exposing himself to danger. In battle one needed eyes everywhere and the scanner was total vision.

'By Nuada!' he thundered. 'How long is this going to take?'

'I'm going as fast as I can, sir. It's not just a question of

...'

'I don't care what it's not just a question of.' Angrily Lobos thrust his chair back from the desk and stood up. If the idiot couldn't move any faster he would have to relocate his headquarters in the laboratory sector where the scanners, and perhaps even the communications system, should still be working. Time was of the essence. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He was indeed losing his touch. He was about to make for the door when Ogrek appeared, drawn and breathing hard from unaccustomed exertion. His mouth hung open, flecked with drying saliva.

He had a stitch and clutched his side.

'It's hopeless,' he gasped. 'They're picking us off one by one.' He stopped for a moment to catch his breath. 'It seems they read your thoughts, Lobos. Their main force left the barracks and since then, as far as they're concerned, it's been nothing but a mopping up operation.'

'And they have no idea of military strategy. Huh!'

Ogrek moved over to the desk to lean heavily against it.

'We can hold out here,' he said, 'with what numbers we have left.'

'What is the point of that?' Lobos screamed, then swung around to face the technician. 'You! Leave that. It's no longer necessary. If you want to save your ridiculous hide get to the launch station. Pick up as many men as you can on the way and, if the Xerons attack the station, hold it. Do you understand? Hold it!'

'Yes, sir.' He started to collect his tools.

'What are you doing?' Lobos yelled. 'Get out! Get out!'

The man fled. Lobos turned back to Ogrek, still nursing his stitch. ‘I need someone reliable,’ he said.

Ogrek frowned. ‘We’ve lost so many. There’s the mercenary from Kreme.’

Lobos snorted with disgust but there was no time to argue. ‘All right. Find him. Tell him to round up every straggler he can find. They’re to fight their way back here, take up defensive positions and hold them. Is that understood?’ Ogrek nodded.

‘Well get to it! What are you hanging about for?’ Lobos suddenly thought of Matt and wished he hadn’t been so recklessly impulsive. Matt would have got him out of this mess. Matt, with his knowledge of chess and strategy, would have turned the tables in a trice and he would now be on the attack instead of desperately trying to ward off the seemingly inevitable. Ogrek clutched his aching side and staggered towards the door. Before he reached it he turned back. ‘We can’t hold them off for ever,’ he said.

‘We don’t have to,’ Lobos replied. ‘Leave that to the merry men and the mercenaries.’ He had a momentary vision of Mort being blasted away under a hail of Xeron fire and found the picture most satisfying. ‘You get back here as quickly as you can make it. We’ll cut and run. We can get to the ship that’s on permanent stand-by at the launch station. Now get moving!’

Ogrek shook his head. ‘We’d never make it.’

‘Not if you don’t obey orders and get going!’ Lobos moved off to behind his desk. ‘But you forget, my friend, we have four extremely valuable pieces of equipment to take with us - they are known as hostages.’

The headquarters building was the hub of a complex that included the laboratories, maintenance, engineering, climate control, storage and, at a further distance, the launch station. All could be reached by covered travelator.

All were guarded by heavily armed, helmeted Morok troops. But there were other entrances and at these too the barricades had been set up by the Moroks, using whatever they could find in the building behind which to entrench themselves should the doors be blasted open. Behind one such barricade at the main doors, Pluton and a small group kept their eyes on the scanner which was focused on the open space in front of the building. Ogrek appeared from behind them,

stopped, and jabbed his stubby finger towards two of the defenders.

‘You... And you... come with rne.’

The men fell in behind Ogrek. He looked at the scanner. The immediate area outside the building appeared deserted.

‘All right, open the doors.’ Ogrek ordered.

Pluton passed his hand over the control and the door slid open. Ogrek and his men moved out and the doors closed behind them. The remaining defenders watched on the screen as the trio hurriedly crossed the open space and disappeared around the corner of the nearest building.

‘What do you think is going on?’ Pluton whispered to his neighbour.

‘Maybe they’re planning an attack.’ The helmeted figure beside him shrugged.

‘I wish I knew,’ Pluton whispered, afraid to raise his voice in case the very walls gave away their position. ‘This waiting gets on my nerves.’

‘Someone’s coming,’ his companion said.

Pluton looked at the screen to see the figure of Ogrek hobbling back towards them. He had developed a cramp to go with his stitch. His gun hand was pressed to his side, his other hand to his thigh, and the affected leg dragged awkwardly as he moved. Pluton waited until the last second before opening the doors and the commander fell across the threshold, panting with fright, exertion, and pain. He was growing too old for this game. The doors closed. Almost immediately a small group of Moroks were seen on the scanner, making their way across the open space. A Xeron appeared from around the corner of the far building and fired. One of the Moroks fell. The others returned fire and the Xeron ducked back behind the building, parts of which were blasted away by the Morok volley.

‘If they make it,’ Ogrek gasped, ‘let them in. And any others. Then hold this position at all costs.’

The Xeron reappeared and let off another blast before once more ducking behind the shelter of the building.

Ogrek turned and fled up the corridor. The remaining Moroks were almost at the doors.

‘Open the doors!’ Pluton’s companion yelled. ‘Open the doors!’

But Pluton hesitated. Some instinct of self-preservation warned him that all was not as it should be. Could the Xerons, shooting as they came, make the distance between them and the doors before they could close again? What if one of the Moroks fell in the doorway and his body held them open?

‘Open the doors!’ the soldier screamed. ‘Let them in!’

He suddenly pushed Pluton violently away and, standing up and back, blasted the remaining defenders from the rear. Pluton had skated across the floor on his rump to be brought up short by hitting the wall. He sat there, totally bemused, watching his gun go spinning down the corridor, well out of reach. The soldier opened the doors and the Moroks surged into the building. Pluton sat, open-mouthed, paralysed with terror, staring at the helmeted figure in front of him. This time it was definitely death.

The Morok raised his hands and slowly removed his helmet. Then he grinned down at Pluton.

‘We are quits,’ he said.

It was Dako.

‘If only we could hear something,’ Barbara said, looking around the small cylindrical chamber. ‘It’s like being sealed up. If only something would happen!’

As if in answer to her wish, the connecting door to Lobos’s office slid open to reveal the Governor and Ogrek facing them, guns drawn. Lobos’s smile was chilling. The four prisoners waited in silence. Had the revolution failed?

Were they to be shot in cold blood? Or was this going to be the final step to the preparation room and the glass cases?

To be gawped at as exhibits in the space museum. To spend an eternity staring with unseeing eyes across a room to a TARDIS that would never travel through time again.

‘Come,’ Lobos ordered, waving them towards him with his gun. ‘We have a journey to make.’

The doors to the office slid open and half a dozen white uniforms

silently entered the room, lining up behind Lobos and his second-in-command. Lobos cast a casual glance over his shoulder before turning back to the prisoners. Then a voice broke the silence. 'Lobos!'

Lobos froze. He swung around, gun raised, and a thin blue ray sent him to join Matt in whatever part of the galaxy ardent chess players went to. A second burst sent Ogrek to join them. He had time for one last glance at the ceiling.

Dako was the first to rip off his helmet and toss it away.

Joyfully he waved his gun in the air and yelled, 'The Trojan Horse! The Trojan Horse!'

In a moment the room was alive with jumping, yelling, triumphant white-uniformed figures. Vicki was so excited, hopping from one to the other, she couldn't get their names out fast enough.

'Tor... Dako... Gyar... Bo... Sita... Who are you?'

'I am Pluton,' was the reply.

The Doctor was thinking. Barbara almost collapsed with relief. Ian's fixed grin was the proverbial one - from ear to ear.

They stood in front of the TARDIS, feeling as travellers do about to start a long journey. Good-byes were always awkward, especially when parting from those with whom one has shared so much. What to say? What to do?

'It must be quite a feeling - getting your own planet back,' Ian said, inwardly writhing at the banality of his remark.

Tor smiled and looked at Vicki. 'Thank you. Vicki,' he said simply. Vicki returned his smile but said nothing. She wasn't sure what it was she was feeling. Was it a moment for pride? Or a moment for modesty? Perhaps just a moment of sadness at the thought that both time and they must move on. She looked up at Dako standing to one side of her, then at Gyar standing on the other side. She took their cold hands in hers and never felt warmer in her life.

'I will never forget you,' she whispered. 'Never!'

The Doctor came bustling out of the TARDIS holding what looked like a crystal between his thumb and forefinger.

‘Well, here it is,’ he said. ‘The cause of all this dimensional trouble we’ve been having.’

Ian took the minute object from the Doctor and looked at it.

‘Now, don’t go and drop it in the sand, Chesterton,’ he was warned. ‘That’s all we need. Lose that and you really *have* altered the future - a whole new ball game as it were.’

Ian placed the chip in the centre of his palm and gazed at it. ‘Hmm... In a way, I suppose, we ought to he grateful to this little thing,’ he said. ‘Really it saved our lives.

Sometime or other, Doctor, you can explain to us what really happened.’

‘Certainly, my boy, certainly.’ The Doctor carefully retrieved the component. ‘It’s quite simp...’ He cleared his throat and chuckled. ‘Well, let’s put it back where it belongs, shall we? And let’s hope, from now on, it behaves itself, hmm?’ He turned to Vicki and Barbara. ‘Have you said your good-byes? It’s time we were off.’

Tor stepped forward. ‘Good-bye, Doctor,’ he said. ‘And thank you.’

‘Oh, nonsense, nonsense, my boy.’ The Doctor sniffed and, taking out his handkerchief, blew his nose loudly.

‘You did it all yourselves, of course you did.’ He turned away and disappeared inside the time-machine. With parting smiles, Ian and Barbara followed. And Vicki, before she closed the door, turned for one final look, one final wave.

The blue light flashed and the TARDIS started to dematerialise. Slowly the sound, and the light, and the police box disappeared to leave Xeros to the Xerons.

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